

PREACHING TRUTH TO A CONSUMERISTIC THERAPEUTIC CULTURE

A THESIS-PROJECT

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To my loving wife Annemarie, my ministry partner and delight of my life.

Thank you for believing in me.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that
by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and
perfect. – Romans 12:2

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be
ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. – 2 Timothy 2:15

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PREFACE

In his five-book series (*No Place for Truth, God in the Wasteland, Losing Our Virtue, Above All Earthly Pow'r*, and *The Courage to be Protestant*), David F. Wells provided a sweeping analysis of the weakening of faith and doctrine in the American evangelical church. It is out of my own concern for the doctrinal integrity of the church that this project was birthed. I have wrestled through the years in attempting to preach truth to people in a winsome way that clearly points out the world's inadequacies and Christ's absolute sufficiency. This project represents my attempt to connect sound exegesis to a preaching model that can confront our culture with God's unchanging truth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Arthurs who has served as a faithful teacher, mentor, coach and editor to help me solidify and articulate my passions into a sensible and readable format. I would like to thank my congregation of Lighthouse Christian Fellowship for being willing to be my “guinea pig” on whom to test my thesis. I would like to thank my loving wife for her ongoing encouragement to me to persevere, and for enduring many of my early mornings and late nights of reading and writing, and responding to my “what do you think about this?” interjections. And mostly I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for loving me, saving me, and calling me to the awesome task of preaching His word. Without his grace, I could not have completed this project.

USE OF SCRIPTURE

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESV) © Crossway Publishing, Wheaton, IL, 2008.

I have used BibleWorks v.9.0 software © BibleWorks, LLC, 2011 as my primary textual and exegetical tool in this project

ABSTRACT

This thesis-project is intended to aid pastors to preach sermons that maintain a robust theological and doctrinal understanding to people who live in today's modern world. Its content describes our modern cultural influences as described in the writings of David F. Wells, and proposes a homiletic model in response to that understanding. How is a pastor to preach in such a way as to engage a people who live in a highly individualized, multi-cultural, pluralistic, consumer culture? With humility I present this project as an instrument to be used by preachers to aid in rightly handling the word of truth in a culture that has "no place for truth."

CHAPTER ONE

A PREACHING RESPONSE TO AN I-FAITH WORLD

We live in a time of change. Charles Dickens might say, the best of times and the worst of times. This is true of the Church in North America: we have unprecedented opportunities for ministry to people of differing cultures and religions with the growth of multi-culturalism. We have an expanded means of communication through the astounding growth of the internet, cell phones, email and social media. We have greater access to information and education than ever before in history. Technology has given us greater conveniences, more efficient travel, and medical advances that have enhanced and improved our lives in many ways. Yet amidst these advances we see a set of unforeseen consequences resulting in problems and challenges that did not exist in former days. Along with the marvels of the modern world we see a growing loss of a moral center, a pluralism that tends to deny exclusive claims to objective truth, and a gnawing sense of loneliness and loss of purpose. We can tend to be satisfied with the trivialities that our consumer culture can provide, while losing a sense of deeper significance in life. With the ever-expanding exposure to different cultures arises a sense that all beliefs are equally valid and thus there is no objective standard of good and evil. As consumers of media on television, computers, iPads and smart phones, we can lose our ability to communicate with real people. As Neil Postman, an early prophet of the electronic culture, says, “Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images.”¹ Thirty years after Postman’s writing we see the expansion of this warning as an ongoing reality. While the Church needs to be wise in its awareness

¹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death – Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 92-93.

of the cultural influences upon people, too often it appears that the Body of Christ has succumbed to the conforming influences of our society resulting in a watering down of our distinctives as the people of God in the world. In particular, this thesis-project examines the nature of the effects of our modern world upon the church, and how the church's preaching can counteract those forces.

The Setting

Cape Cod is a region that embodies the cultural milieu of our postmodern culture consisting of a self-oriented, consumeristic, therapeutic approach to life. Referred to as "the Cape," the culture in this region is functionally secular, and has an estimated 1.5% of the population which is evangelical.² A majority of the people (as with the entire New England region) are nominal Catholics, though they are not consistent in attending mass. Most of the population in general does not attend church on a regular basis, though this is not a new trend in this region. Three decades ago, seventy-three percent of the year-round population of the Cape was "virtually unchurched."³ Cape Cod is distinct in that it is neither an urban, small town, nor suburban culture, but is considered a "resort community." The Cape's culture tends to have a more laid-back approach to life, with people seeking to keep all their options open. As a result, there is a natural aversion to commitment as it results in limiting options. Personal experience, pleasure, and enjoyment are of high value to the pursuit of a fulfilled life. The need to discover the

² J.D. Payne, "From 35,000 to 15,000 Feet: Evangelical Statistics in the US and Canada: A State/Province, Metro, and County Glimpse." *Great Commission Research Journal* 1:2. (2010): 230-253.

³ Boston (AP), "Cape Church Survey shows 3 in 4 virtually unchurched." *Nashua Telegraph*. June 23, 1980, accessed July 15, 2016, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2209&dat=19800623&id=MZ8rAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=SvwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=4937,4362531&hl=en>.

meaning of life and the desire to be part of a significant cause are always important, but are directed towards the self as the defining entity of that which is significant.

Although most people in this area are Catholic, they tend to think and live secular lifestyles, and consider religion or spirituality a very personal issue that should not affect our outside activities. People may be prone to think of themselves as spiritual, but not necessarily associate with traditional religious views. According to theologian David F. Wells, the effect of the postmodern ethos has “emptied itself of formal religious doctrines and structures. The distinctive characteristics of this spirituality include an anti-institutional bent, a deeply privatized nature, a rampant individualism, and a therapeutic *modus operandi*.⁴ Individualized spirituality is a feature of today’s culture with a growing segment of “nones” (religiously unaffiliated) showing a 52 percent increase in 7 years.⁵ This culture’s spirituality consists of a mixture of environmental concerns, personal meditation, and an individualized sense of wellness found in self-actualization. For Cape Codders with the long winters, the summer season is the premium time of the year to enjoy the beaches, golfing, fishing, and a plethora of outdoor activities, which drive church attendance down even further. The pursuit of pleasure and the enjoyment of the fruits of the rigors of making a living are often life’s aim. Faith is not spoken about publicly and is considered deeply personal and self-directed. For the Cape this is merely a regionalized manifestation of the national trend towards a self-directed, self-defined spirituality. What works “for me” is what is important, regardless of any objective truth claims. The Cape culture carries with it the similar trend across America of this self-

⁴ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 95-96.

⁵ Michael Lipka, “A Closer Look at America’s rapidly growing religious ‘nones’,” *Pew Research Study*, May 13, 2015, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones>.

oriented consumeristic way of thinking. I will refer to this self-oriented, consumeristic, therapeutic condition as the “*iFaith*” syndrome or condition.

The Problem

There is a growing ambivalence toward and marginalization of traditional Christian faith in American culture. While Cape Cod has certain regional distinctives, this area serves as a microcosm of this trend across the entire country. The concerns and influences stated in this thesis-proposal affect my region of Cape Cod as well as the greater culture across the nation. The major problems include the loss of truth, the marginalization of God, and the rise of the autonomous self.

The first problem we face on the Cape is the cultural rejection of absolute truth. The influences of pluralism have resulted in a greater appreciation for various cultures and values from across the world. This appreciation, however, has not come without a cost. The Enlightenment brought us great hopes of a future utopia ushered in by humanity’s ongoing ever-improving expansion through knowledge, science, art, and literature. The end of the twentieth century, however, saw a growing skepticism to these un-realized promises and the birth of the postmodern ethic. In the drive for tolerance, many now view all opinions, values, morals, and religions as equal in value. In our drive for freedom of thought we have cast off any ideas of an external objective truth as a power play on the weak or gullible. “Who are we,” after all, “to be so arrogant as to claim something is universally true? How can all those other people be wrong?” and so goes the thinking. In our culture according to Guinness, “truth is dead. Truth in any objective or absolute sense, truth that is independent of the mind and of the knower, no longer exists. At best, truth is relative – it’s all a matter of interpretation and it all depends on the

perspective.”⁶ Truth no longer holds sway. The modern world is now cast free from all external authorities, resulting in “the location of the human interpreter in the center of reality.”⁷

In addition to the loss of truth, the culture of Cape Cod has witnessed the marginalization of God. While most Cape Codders have a lightly theistic worldview, God is pushed to the periphery, only considered as a personal matter that should not infringe upon our daily living. Church is rarely even consciously thought of, except for events such as weddings and funerals, and occasionally Christmas and Easter. God tends to only be thought of in times of great crisis or tragedy and death. The secular nature of our New England society is not one that rejects God completely, but merely shifts him to the margins of life. “It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant.”⁸ Technology has replaced the need for God in terms of science, medicine, and communication. This marginalization of God has resulted in a growing number of people who reject God outright. Among the religiously unaffiliated about one-third do not believe in God’s existence, showing a growing secularism among the “nones” that are not affiliated with a religion.⁹

The third manifesting problem regarding our culture is the rise of the autonomous self. With the release of the moorings of the idea of truth, and the marginalization of an

⁶ Os Guinness, *Time For Truth – Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype & Spin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 11.

⁷ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 60.

⁸ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland; The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 88.

⁹ Michael Lipka, “Religious ‘nones’ are not only growing, they’re becoming more secular,” *Pew Research Center*, Nov. 11, 2015, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/11/religious-nones-are-not-only-growing-theyre-becoming-more-secular>.

external intrusive God, we are left with ourselves to define and defend reality as we see it. No longer constrained by external demands from a God or other objective reality, we become the center of our own lives. The rejection of external authority results in the supreme autonomous self as the sole arbiter of right and wrong, or morality. Virtues no longer hold sway in restraining wrong; everything is now a matter of individual values. This has resulted in a modern therapeutic view of life, of pain, and of salvation. Rather than seeking to be holy, we seek to be happy. Rather than desiring to be virtuous, we are content to be comfortable. The only authority that now remains is that of private experience.¹⁰ People tend to be more attracted to a “privatized worldview” with a skeptical view of reason, and a denial of an over-arching meta-narrative that gives meaning to life. Personal choice and experiential definition are now what drive people’s lives. Christian faith is viewed by many as a tool of self-discovery, and good and evil are reduced to a sense of well-being.¹¹ The powerful markers at work in today’s consumerism include: “volatility, obsolescence, the rapid passing of fashions and ideas, the disappearance of stability, constant innovation, constant revision, repackaging, the new look, the newer than new product, the future always looming over the present.”¹²

People are now more inclined to find solace and inspiration at the golf course than in a sanctuary. They are more likely to look for joy and fulfillment in shopping or in their jobs, than in the Bible. The matter of personal choice is a primal value. Actually *committing* to a choice is less important than the fact that one maintains his choices, and keeps his options open. Our families and our schedules are busier than ever; schedules packed with baseball, ballet, scouts, fishing, and an array of many “good” and healthy

¹⁰ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 86.

¹¹ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 183.

¹² Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, 77.

activities that often take the place of church, faith, and God. Everything is viewed as a commodity to be custom-blended to one's own personal liking, as life becomes a "cafeteria" of choices that we select, based upon our feelings and urges of the moment. In a world of iPods, iPads, iPhones, we see this carried over logically to the arena of faith, where we have our own custom mix, our own "iFaith."

These influences have not only been at work in the secular world, but I believe it can be demonstrated that these forces are impacting believers within the church as well. It would seem that the development of this iFaith thinking has had a more profound effect upon believers in the church than we like to admit. Regarding the loss of truth, about 41% of practicing Christians agree somewhat or strongly agree that "whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know."¹³ Regarding the exclusive claims of Christ being the only way to heaven, a troubling observation emerges: Research indicates that one-fourth of born again Christians believe all people are eventually saved. About the same number (26%) believe it doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons. Confusion about the differences between religions is rampant. Amazingly, as many as 40% of born again Christians believe Christians and Muslims worship the same God.¹⁴ The confusion about gender issues and marriage has infiltrated believers as well. About 54% of U.S. Christians believe homosexuality should be accepted, rather than rejected by society.¹⁵

¹³ George Barna, "The End of Absolutes: America's New Moral Code," *Barna Group*, May 25, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/research/culture-media/research-release/americas-new-moral-code#.V6jjSPkrK00>.

¹⁴ George Barna, "What Americans Believe about Universalism and Pluralism," *Research Releases in Faith & Christianity*, *Barna Group*, April 18, 2011, accessed July 15, 2016, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/484-what-americans-believe-about-universalism-and-pluralism#.V4kG7_krK00.

¹⁵ Carlyle Murphy, "Most U.S. Christian groups grow more accepting of homosexuality," *Pew Research Center*, December 18, 2015, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/18/most-u-s-christian-groups-grow-more-accepting-of-homosexuality>.

Ongoing research continues to indicate a growing weakening of biblical faith and dilution of doctrinal understandings within the church. Fifty-nine percent of Christians do not believe Satan is a living spiritual being. Thirty-nine percent of believers think that Jesus sinned. Fifty-eight percent of Christians do not believe the Holy Spirit is a living entity and is only a symbol of God's power or presence.¹⁶ While churches are working now more than ever to attract "seekers" who are religiously non-affiliated, the research indicates that the quality of that belief is not in keeping with Christ's command to make disciples based upon His teachings. In a culture dominated by a consumer appetite with a myriad of choices, Christians have been perhaps unintentionally but measurably influenced to exhibit tendencies as "church-shoppers."

The presence of a consistent biblical worldview has been in sharp decline among believers. According to Barna Research, "a 'biblical worldview' was defined as believing that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn his way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today. In the research, anyone who held all of those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview." And according to that research, only about 19% of born again Christians have such an outlook on life.¹⁷ The lack of a consistent biblical worldview among believers is indicative of an enfeebling of faith and results in an

¹⁶ George Barna, "Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist," *Research Releases in Faith & Christianity*, Barna Group, April 13, 2009, accessed July 15, 2016, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/260-most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist#.V4kEf_krK00.

¹⁷ George Barna, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years," *Research Releases in Faith & Christianity*, Barna Group, March 9, 2009, accessed July 15, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years#.V4lPCPrJhE>.

absence of an understanding of doctrinal and theological realities. It is my contention that the effects of the forces of modernity and subsequent postmodernity have had this corrosive effect upon the moral and spiritual condition of this country and the church into the twenty-first century.

As we have observed, the data indicate that the evangelical churches, including churches on Cape Cod, have not been immune to the infectious nature of this increasingly secular mind-set that has moved God to the periphery and the self to the center. The world's influence and pressure upon the church is not a modern invention. The Apostle Paul encouraged the first generation believers to be aware of the world's cultural power to conform believers with his warning, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). It is my assertion that pastors play a critical role in shepherding Christ's church by maintaining purity of faith, proper adherence to doctrine, and biblical integrity. Godly pastors who have a genuine heart for Christ and for His Church must stay *alert* to the power of the world, and continue to encourage the believers to stand against the subtle drift to a personalized, therapeutic "theology-light." This can become even more of a challenge to the many small churches of Cape Cod that struggle financially, and the temptation to gloss over any uncomfortable preaching texts is very real. Of concern is that theology is losing ground in its place in the center of the church and the church may find that doctrinal truth has landed "on the edges of evangelical life; has been dislodged from its center."¹⁸ God could so easily be shifted to the periphery and self is ever-ready to step in to fill the void. iFaith appears to be an ever-present pathogen attempting to infiltrate the church. This

¹⁸ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 106.

actualization of the self and the desire for personal happiness and autonomy have resulted in a consumeristic, therapeutic understanding of life even among some genuine believers. It is my conviction that one of the most important factors contributing to the health and vitality of the church is in the preaching of the whole counsel of God's Word. An observed trend over the last few decades among churches is such an emphasis on "felt needs" that the weightier spiritual needs of people may be neglected, including the issues of sin, repentance, and subsequent obedience. What Bonhoeffer referred to as "cheap grace" in the first half of the twentieth century appears to have morphed into its postmodern cousin among believers today. What makes one feel good about one's image, about one's own life, and that which will improve one's standard of living have become the gold standard of personal value among unsuspecting believers. The pursuit of the "ten steps to a better you," or the "five secrets to a better marriage," or "top seven parenting tips" can be very helpful to believers, but should not be the sole theological diet offered from the pulpit. It is my contention that today's modern challenges require a concerted focus on a robust and engaging theology and doctrine in preaching to prevent the drift away from our historical faith.

This drift appears to be due to the marginalization of the gospel, a weakening of doctrinal and theological understanding, and underdeveloped and consumer-oriented believers who are more likely to leave the faith when their felt needs are no longer met in the church. These influences should be addressed as part of the ongoing discipleship of believers. The challenge that preachers face is how to address congregations in a way that carries the rhetorical strength of persuasion while maintaining the doctrinal integrity of the Scriptures.

Some churches have attempted to focus so intently upon the felt needs of potential church attenders (“seekers”) that the deeper issues of God’s sovereignty, the need for repentance and holy living have been neglected. I believe the result of this seeker-driven preaching strategy unintentionally *encourages* the therapeutic and consumer desires of the audience as “customers.” So-called “seekers” become consumers, pastors become CEO business leaders, churches become marketing outlets, the gospel becomes a product, and faith has become the purchase.¹⁹ A significant marker of the weakening of truth and doctrine is in the growing trend of felt-need topical sermons and a resulting silent omission of the presentation of the harder truths of repentance, the exclusivity of Jesus as the only way to God, the judgment of God, sin, and hell. Former President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Dr. Paige Patterson lays the blame squarely on the church. Patterson said, “You can traverse the entire United States on any given Sunday morning, and you very probably will not hear a sermon on the judgment of God or eternal punishment.” Patterson added, “Evangelicals have voted by the silence of their voices that they either do not believe in [the doctrine of Hell] or else no longer have the courage and conviction to stand and say anything about it.”²⁰

One of the manifestations of the avoidance of the hard truths is in the popularization of the so-called “prosperity gospel,” which teaches that God wants all Christians to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Even among churches which eschew the prosperity gospel message, there is still the temptation among churches on the Cape (and across the country) to join the increasing numbers of churches who adapt themselves to

¹⁹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, 278, 297.

²⁰ Paige Patterson, “Most Don’t Believe in Hell, *CBN News*. March, 2007, accessed July 15 2016, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2007/March/Most-Dont-Believe-in-Hell/?Print=true>.

the “felt needs” of the congregation, viewing them as consumers, which provides only a momentary and fragmentary sense of well-being.²¹ The enemy prowls about to devour believers and unbelievers alike. The world constantly presses for conformity. Our own sin nature can cause us to give into temptations to compromise for the sake of expediency. By God’s grace, and in His Spirit’s power, by the authority of His Word, pastors must stay at their post, stand in the gap, and rightly divide the Word of truth. The problem is real. But there is a hope.

Research Question

In light of my ministry setting and the problems described above, the research question this thesis-proposal addresses is: *“What kind of preaching should a pastor employ to counter the cultural pressures of the “iFaith” condition?”*

The motive for this project is an intense desire to see the church fulfill its primary task of making disciples in the local church and among all nations, which involves the clear presentation of the gospel and the teachings of Christ.

Filling an auditorium and meeting budgetary goals is not part of that commission. Getting unbelievers to agree to a set of beliefs, say a prayer, and calling themselves “converts” is not the great commission. Whether churches are large or small, contemporary or traditional, urban, suburban or rural – our commission is the same: our highest calling is to glorify God by obeying His call to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that He has commanded. In today’s world of religious tolerance, self-orientation, and an eroding moral center, the stage is set where the church can rise to her finest hour. At the heart and center of the church stand the preachers who

²¹ David Wells, “The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church,” accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bleeding.html>.

have the high privilege of proclaiming the very Word of God as our hope, the *only* hope for the church and for the world. The newest programming, the slickest sound and lighting techniques or the cleverest rhetorical skills are not sufficient for the church to present and reflect the presence of God's glory. Each church and each pastor should pursue excellence in programming, loving relationships, authentic worship, and any techniques that enhance and improve ministry, but at the core of our existence is the message of the Gospel, the teaching of God's Word. As people hear the Word of God preached, the Spirit moves and changes lives. His Word speaks against the leveling of all opinions as equally valid common in today's pluralism. It confronts the self-oriented consumer culture with the challenge of a higher kingdom. It proclaims an unchanging truth that will last forever. It magnifies and extols the greatness and magnificence of God above all earthly powers.

It is the faithful proclamation and exhortation of God's Word, faithfully presented in expository integrity, which is the tool God has chosen to form the backbone for His church. As Os Guinness has stated, "In his mercy, he may revive the church, and the Christian faith may flourish once again and provide the working faith of the West, or he may not. That is not for us to know. Our faith in God must always be our defining trust and the compass for our way of life. Living before the absolute presence of God, we are called to be faithful, and therefore unmanipulable, unbribeable, undeterrable and unclubbable."²² As the shepherds to their congregations, pastors are held to a high accountability before God to preach and teach God's Word, in all its fullness without

²² Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 223.

compromise. Cultures shift and change, but God's Word never changes. That leads us to our central thesis.

How is a preacher to preach in light of these challenges? What homiletical structures should be employed to make sure we present a constant presentation of robust theology and doctrine incorporated in every sermon? What place does the pulpit play in equipping the saints for service in today's complexities?

Thesis

One of the foremost experts in understanding today's modern culture and its influence upon the church today is Dr. David F. Wells. His writings provide the basis for my thesis-project. I contend that to help counter this cultural "*iFaith*" drift, pastors can employ a homiletic which incorporates the sociological and theological implications of the writings of David F. Wells that demonstrate the critical need and relevance of biblical truth as the antidote to the "iFaith" world which makes "No Place for Truth."

As one of the most astute observers of the trend I refer to as the "iFaith syndrome" Wells presents a thorough analysis of the historical causes and cultural influences that shape our modern world. He does an excellent job of presenting the problem, and it is the goal of this paper to present a homiletical system as a response to that analysis. Although Wells has his critics (these will be examined in chapter 3), his writings nevertheless provide a clear perspective of the causes and results of the cultural pressures which concern this thesis project. To date, a homiletical methodology has not been formed which incorporates his insights. My desire is to develop a "Wellsian Homiletic" that will be useful in addressing the various erosive cultural influences upon

the church and help believers develop a greater biblical discernment in living in the world, but not of the world.

Expositional preaching of God's Word must accurately present the doctrinal and theological revelation of God as well as connect that revelation to our modern times. God's truth is true for all times, but it is also eminently relevant. While the historical distinctives of Israel and of the early church are quite different than today's technological world, the Scriptures speak about the nature of God who never changes, human nature which never changes apart from Christ, in a world that will remain broken until the return of Christ. The Scriptures are relevant, if accurately taught and preached, because they genuinely relate to the real questions and conundrums of the human experience.

This preaching methodology will seek to provide a biblical preaching model to remind us that God's truth is relevant now as in all times, that Christ is King and is at the center of all of life and not on the periphery, and that self must continually be placed on the scaffold to allow Christ to remain on the throne as Lord and God. Truth exposes the absolute holiness of God and our sinfulness apart from Christ. The emphasis of the centrality of Christ helps us maintain a proper perspective of life's priorities and that God will never be marginalized. The biblical presentation of self as a sinner made by the master for his pleasure and in need of redemption, keeps us in a proper attitude of humility and obedience before the Lord. Love and holiness are perfectly joined in God.

This kind of truthful relevant preaching will entail the recapture of virtue over values, truth over preferences, morality over therapy, and God over self. It is God's revealed truth that will transform lives; commitment to following the correct technique will never suffice. This truth-based preaching will serve to place us back onto the wheel

as lumps of clay to be shaped and molded by the Master Potter. The homiletic system developed by this paper will keep presenting the question: “What truth is being challenged, ignored, or needs to be emphasized in the preaching of every sermon?” It will ask of the listeners, “How is God glorified or marginalized in our lives?” It will challenge the listeners with “How do we wrongly position self as the focus and how can Christ be put back in the center of life?” We must preach with a passion about the genuine life and death, eternity-oriented need of our people to hear from God, showing them all of Scripture’s immense relevance to our modern complex world.

Project Overview

I will defend this thesis by exploring its biblical/theological framework in Chapter 2. The convictions developed from the teachings of Scripture and years of ministry are founded upon the absolute authority of the Word of God as accurate, and God’s revelation to His church about His nature and His plan for us. It is the preaching of God’s Word that is central to the church’s task of making disciples. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). I will present the Scriptural teaching of the authority of the Bible as God’s Word that confronts, informs, directs, protects, and transforms lives.

I will examine the biblical support of how this authority expresses the redemptive plan of God that finds its culmination in the death and resurrection of Christ and His ultimate redemption for all of mankind at his return. I will examine the theological implications of how this Word has a power of its own, in spite of the weaknesses and imperfections of the messengers (i.e. preachers). It is this message of the gospel itself that “is the power of God for salvation” of both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 1:16).

This theological framework will also include the biblical understanding of the nature of man and society and its brokenness and its need for redemption that only God can accomplish. This study will include the theology of the total inability and “total depravity” (i.e. Calvin) of humanity to right itself, and the ultimate need of the gospel.

I will then present the biblical and theological role of the significance of the pastor and his role as chief under-shepherd who is to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

I will examine the biblical and theological conviction that preaching is the *primary* means that God has designed for the proclamation of the gospel message. This proclamation also includes the explanation of the truth of His Word and exhortation to practical obedience that is inseparable from the relevance of His Word to daily living. I will then present the gospel of Christ and his grace and love as the only sustainable motivating and enabling force that can counter the negative effects of a culture at odds with His ways. There is a place for truth in today’s evangelical churches, and it is needed now more than ever to be pouring from the headwaters of the pulpits in every church. Paul charges Timothy to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

This biblical message will be interpreted from the historical redemptive understanding of Biblical theology that sees God’s progressive revelation through the Scripture being seen in shadowy or seminal form in the Older Testament books, and finding their culmination of the coming of Christ, His work through the church, finding

ultimate consummation at His return. Genuine preaching must be doctrinally solid and theologically robust if it is to be Biblical.

Chapter 3 will analyze the pertinent literature with particular focus on the writings of David F. Wells. While not exhaustive, Wells appears to have presented a compelling description of causes and consequences of this cultural influence on the spiritual condition of the American church. I will also include a brief review of some of the writings of Os Guinness and refer to three presentations conducted by both Wells and Guinness at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. It is this foundational analysis that will provide the framework with which I plan to build a homiletical response; what the preacher is to preach in light of these realities.

Chapter 4 will set forth the project design consisting of development of the homiletical model, implementation, and evaluation of this thesis. My project includes the following:

A. I will critique the strengths and weaknesses of Wells' analysis. My primary means of doing so is through reading his works, and an interview with Dr. Wells also augments my reading.

B. I will present a synthesis of a homiletical method that provides fresh and creative ways to speak truth in a way that is compelling and relevant to a culture adverse to truth. This includes the implementation of a grid or template asking for some component of truth as well as a component of motivational relevance. The starting point for this homiletic is the model set forth by Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. I will

build upon Robinson's method by employing the structures developed by Pelton,²³ which I will call the Wells-HOM that will include: 1) Clear doctrinal truth from the text; 2) social implications and relevance that confronts the "iFaith" culture; 3) how Christ Redeems or answers those needs; and 4) how it can be practically lived out.

C. I will include an interview of Dr. Wells a second time for his review and critique of this method once developed.

D. I will preach a sermon series on "Relevant-Truth to an iFaith World" and measure the effectiveness of this approach via qualitative survey before and after this sermon series.

Chapter 5 presents the outcomes of the project design. I will catalog what steps or components should be included as a finalized "Wells-Hom" model in sermon preparation and delivery for the edification and building up of the church to fulfill its mission to glorify God. As Paul exhorted Timothy: "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

²³ Randal Pelton, *Preaching with Greater Accuracy: Finding Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching* (Electronic pre-published manuscript provided by Randal Pelton at GCTS D.Min. residency June 2014).

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGY OF PREACHING TRUTH IN A WORLD OF NO TRUTH

“Give me liberty or give me death!” These passionate words of Patrick Henry have inspired many Americans throughout our history. The fiercely American ideology of personal freedom is a part of the air we breathe. It is a part of our culture. It is a part of us. We value our freedom of speech, religion, and choice. We bristle at the thought of anyone telling us what to do, and are especially repulsed by any sense of being bullied or forced into changing our personal belief systems. Of course, I am an American who is very grateful for the freedoms we enjoy and I love our country. But we can see that out of the fertile ground of this freedom may grow the weed of opposition to authority which results in a rejection of the idea of absolute truth. If Nietzsche is correct that “God is dead” then it is reasonable to conclude that truth is dead as well; at least truth as an objective standard of reality, right and wrong. As Wells states bluntly, “The bottom line for our modernized world is that there is no truth.”¹ In our attempt to free ourselves from authority, the concept of truth is no longer tolerated in a world that espouses to be an age of tolerance. With the rejection of truth, then it is also reasonable to see the loss of the authority of the Bible and theology. It is my contention that Wells is correct in his analysis that the resultant secularization of our society has bled into the church, weakening its idea of truth, the authority of the Bible, and the foundational building blocks of its theology. “As the nostrums of the therapeutic age supplant confession, and as preaching is psychologized, the meaning of Christian faith becomes privatized. At a

¹ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 280.

single stroke, confession is eviscerated and reflection reduced mainly to thought about one's self.”²

In this chapter I will provide the biblical and theological framework for a homiletical response to the “iFaith” influences that include the theological and biblical responses to three major emphases: loss of truth, the marginalization of God, and the autonomous of self. I will interact with the writings of David F. Wells because I believe his perspective to be a very sober and accurate sense of the loss of truth and the subsequent loss of theology in the church and what the recovery of that theology should look like. Wells’ theology can be deduced more from what he describes as having been lost in the evangelical world, and less about what should be emphasized for renewal for the future. I will also provide a biblical and theological defense for the role that preaching should play as the significant instrument to counter this “iFaith” cultural drift of our postmodern world that has no place for truth. These biblical and theological convictions provide the foundation and framework that will shape and direct this “Wellsian” homiletic system for preaching truth that is theological, biblical and relevant.

Response to the Loss of Truth

“What is Truth?” So Pontius Pilate asked Jesus who stood before his inquisition (John 18:38). The first major category of Truth must begin at its source: truth begins with God. Throughout human history people have demonstrated a deep inner sense that God exists, that they are his creatures, and that he is their Creator.³ The Genesis account tells us that “in the beginning, God created...” (Gen 1:1). God is the author and source of truth because it is in his very nature.

² Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 101.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 141.

For a working definition of truth, I refer to Wells' theology of truth which is rooted in the classic definition emerged from the Middle Ages: "truth is the correspondence between an object and our knowledge of it."⁴ He holds to the view that Christianity is a supernatural religion in which God reveals himself, in his truth and reality. This is not a truth that is only true for the individual, but truth for all people as revealed by God himself. This stands in contrast to the classical liberal view of Rene Descartes that doubts authority and views all reality as perceptions that may have a tendency to distortion. His famous quotation, "Cogito ergo sum," I think therefore I am places the understanding of truth within the control of the human perceiver following the empiricism of the Enlightenment.⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher is often credited with being the father of liberalism and contends that we cannot know God as truth as he really is, but only as he appears to us, as we experience him.⁶ Barth's neo-orthodox view affirms God's revelation of truth that is known only as we experience Christ.⁷ In contrast to these human-centered views, according to Wells, as well as my own convictions, truth in God does not depend upon human reception, but is an objective reality defined by God himself and not by man.⁸ Whether we receive truth or not, truth exists as God exists. That leads us to an important aspect of truth: that truth can be known.

Not only is God the author of truth, but we also see that His truth can be *known*. Because man is finite and God is infinite, "if a man is to know God it must come about

⁴ David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 72.

⁵ Bruce Ware, "Liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy, Evangelicalism," *Biblical Training: Systematic Theology I*, accessed September 30, 2016, www.biblicaltraining.org/library/liberalism-neo-orthodoxy-evangelicalism/systematic-theology-i/bruce-ware.

⁶ Ware, "Liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy, Evangelicalism."

⁷ Ware, "Liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy, Evangelicalism."

⁸ In this paper I use the traditional term "man" to refer to humanity, intending no disparaging of women.

by God's revelation of himself to man."⁹ God reveals himself through nature (Ps 19:1). Paul tells us that even the unbelieving Gentiles "knew" of God, but did not honor him or give thanks to him (Rom 1:19-23). God's special revelation comes to us through the Spirit-empowered authors of the Scriptures, and ultimately the most complete modality of revelation is the incarnation of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ The fullness of God's revelation is found in Jesus Christ. Christ is the "word" which is the Greek word "λόγος (*logos*).¹¹ John writes, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14). John uses "*logos*" because it is the natural word for expressing the meaning of the Hebrew word "דָּבָר (*dabar*)" in the context of God's revelation.¹¹

For the complete fulfillment of our being, we must know God, and since the knowledge of God would require an eternity to develop fully, qualitatively it must exist in an eternal dimension.¹² Our perceptions of truth are not complete and are still wrought with the flaws. Paul affirms, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). And it is also a sad reality that some may demonstrate racism, cruelty, and even bullying power plays in the name of "truth." While it is accurate that we do not know

⁹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 153.

¹⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 190.

¹¹ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall Eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 483.

¹² Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositors Bible Commentary, John and Acts*, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 162.

fully, we can affirm that what Christ has revealed may be sufficiently known to bring salvation. This leads us to the second major category of truth – truth in God’s Word.

Although Christ is not physically with us, He has not left us alone. He has sent us his Spirit to dwell within us, whom he promised “will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). He has also inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments to leave us the written record his word for our lives. We have this written testimony as the authoritative record of his nature, his ways, and his truth in the sixty-six books we call the Bible. From these canonical books we develop our theology. It is in the authority of Scriptures that we can develop a consistent and practical theology that will provide the foundation of our lives as believers. As Wells writes, “Theology is not simply a philosophical reflection about the nature of things but is rather the cogent articulation of the knowledge of God. Its substance is not drawn from mere human reflection, no matter how brilliant, but from the biblical word by which it is nurtured and disciplined.”¹³

The Bible is our source of truth because it carries God’s authority. “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scriptures are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”¹⁴ Paul writes to Timothy his high view of Scripture and its usefulness: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Greek word for Scripture is “γραφή (*graphe*),” in which Paul is specifically here referring to the Old Testament. In 1 Tim 5:18 and 2 Pet 3:16 this word also includes some

¹³ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 5.

¹⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

of the New Testament writings along with the Old Testament writings. This passage indicates that all “*πᾶσα (pasa)*” of the sacred writings come to us from God. These words are described as being “God-breathed” “*θεόπνευστος (theopneustos)*” and this “breathing” must be understood as a metaphor for God speaking forth the words of Scripture.

Barth’s neo-orthodox view rejects the Bible as an authority in itself, but views it as a witness or mediator to God’s Word, who is Christ, and the Bible becomes the Word of God only as he speaks to us through it of Christ.¹⁵ The liberal view of the Bible rejects all notions of the supernatural and seeks to find God’s moral vision through the Bible as mere stories to teach us how to live.¹⁶ In contrast to these views, I believe the Scriptures to be supernaturally empowered words given by the Holy Spirit’s unction to its recipients who in turn wrote down these words that are the very words of God. As Wells notes, “The Bible is not a remarkable illustration of what we have already heard within ourselves; it is a remarkable discovery of what we have not and cannot hear within ourselves. It is how we apply ourselves to learn what God has disclosed of himself in a realm outside ourselves that is important.”¹⁷

Inspiration is the means God used to transmit his perfect Word through imperfect humans with infallibility. Peter describes the divine nature of this inspiration as he writes, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-21).

¹⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 184-185.

¹⁶ R. C. Sproul, “The Liberal Agenda,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/liberal-agenda>.

¹⁷ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 279.

I believe the verbal plenary view of inspiration is the correct understanding in order to accept these words as the authority from God. This verbal plenary understanding accepts all the words of Scripture as God's words, full and complete.

Paul exhorts Timothy that God's words are said to be "useful" (ESV) or "profitable" (NASB) using the Greek word "ὠφέλιμος (*ophelimos*)" meaning it gives advantage, profit, and helpfulness to those who live by it (2 Tim 3:16). Four of the areas of usefulness of Scripture include teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. The first listed benefit of Scriptures is for teaching. The word for "teaching" is also translated "doctrine" (KJV) and is the Greek word "διδασκαλίαν (*didaskalia*)" and refers to the instruction and transmission of doctrinal precepts. Not only is Scripture profitable for teaching it is also useful for reproof, or "rebuking" (NIV). The word for "reproof" is "ἐλεγχος (*elegchos*)" which means to convict, refute, or expose and bring to light that which is in error. Following the reproof of the exposed wrong direction Paul presents the next benefit of Scriptures, the blessing of "correction." This word, "ἐπανόρθωσις (*epanorthosis*)," and describe the restoration or straightening of that which was distorted or deformed. Lastly, we see that all Scripture is useful for "training in righteousness" παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ. This "training" *paideian* involves the work of whole training and cultivation of mind and morals and involves commands, corrections, and discipline for the sake of God's "righteousness" *dikaioisune*. This involves learning to live out God's righteousness by grace, like a child learns to walk. This understanding of the truth of God's Word is foundational to our belief that truth may be known, that it finds its authority from God, and that it carries powerful, practical relevance to all people. While all Scripture is equally true, we recognize that much of the

Old Testament law has been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ, so the sacrificial laws no longer apply. Proper handling of the whole of Scripture must involve an understanding of the progressive revelation and redemptive plan of God through history. God's Word is best understood as a part of "Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible" with God's historic revelation as it "unfolded itself in a long series of successive acts."¹⁸ The Bible is to be understood within its entire redemptive historical context.

As this project proposes, we must be clear about the nature of truth if we are to employ a homiletic for preaching God's truth to a world and church that has drifted into an "iFaith" belief. We affirm that truth is objective and outside of us, it is founded in God, finds its fulfillment in Christ, and is recorded in the Bible. Having addressed these foundational concepts, we now turn to the next major aspect of Wells' critique: the marginalization of God.

Response to the Marginalization of God

The vast majority of Americans still believe in God or a universal spirit, even though the numbers have decreased from 92% in 2007 to 89% in 2014.¹⁹ According to Wells, the problem we have with God does not lead us to deny him, but to re-locate him from the center to the periphery, to *marginalize* God. One of the defining marks of our time is that "God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant."²⁰ The transcendence of God has been traded in for a

¹⁸ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, reprinted 2015), 5.

¹⁹ Michael Lipka, "Americans' faith in God may be eroding," *Pew Research Study*, November 4, 2014, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/04/americans-faith-in-god-may-be-eroding>.

²⁰ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland, the Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 88.

watered down version of his immanence that only includes God in the ways he can meet our physical and psychological needs as we perceive them. Wells' theology emphasizes the need to have a theocentric view of life, rather than today's tendency towards an anthropocentric orientation. "The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel too easy, and his Christ too common."²¹ God is not our concierge or our butler, but is the Almighty God who stands above and beyond, and outside of humanity. God's transcendence is more than a matter of distance or degree of separation from humanity. God is transcendent in that he is infinitely qualitatively superior to, above and independent from his creation.²² God is at the center of all creation and everything else exists for his pleasure and glory. God stands outside of time and space and governs everything according to his divine will. The Psalmist praises the God who is exalted "on high" (Ps 113:5, 99:2-3), and that his "greatness is unsearchable" (Ps 145:3).

One issue of God's centrality is his sovereignty over all creation. He exercises uncontested power and rule over his creation. God describes his sovereignty through the prophet Isaiah when he proclaims, "remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isa 46:9-10). God's "purpose" is the Hebrew word, "רָצוֹן (*chephets*)" which means the course of action in which he delights and takes pleasure. God's sovereignty is pleasant and good. God chose Israel not because they were

²¹ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 30.

²² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 267.

great and numerous, but because of his divine sovereign choice to love them (Deut 7:7,8). Because God is sovereign, he cannot and will not be marginalized, but works through history to accomplish his will. Even though mankind ignores him, God's ways and his plans cannot be thwarted. Regarding the nations, "he makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away" (Job 12:23). Even regarding man's worst evil, God cannot be marginalized for His power is already at work. "The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble" (Prov 16:4).

Another aspect of God's centrality is his holiness. God is holy in that he is absolutely unique, special, separated, and distinct from his creation. "Holiness in God is everything that sets him apart from the sinful creation, and it is everything that elevates him above it in moral splendor."²³ Moses sang, "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Ex 15:11). God's holiness also includes his absolute moral purity and beauty. The Hebrew word for holy is "קדוש (*qadowsh*)" and its various forms are used 698 times in the Scriptures. When Isaiah received his vision from the Lord he heard the seraphim calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:3). At this sight Isaiah trembled in fear declaring, "Woe is me!" in recognition of his own moral failure in the presence of God's holiness. Erickson states, "Proper reaction to God's holiness, his separateness, is one of awe, reverence, and silence."²⁴ The biblical Jesus stands in stark contrast to the cultural "nice guy" Jesus who likes everybody and makes no demands. Jesus warns, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the

²³ David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind, How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 103.

²⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 285-286.

soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). Paul reiterates this warning with the words to the Romans, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). The greatest expression of God’s sovereignty and holiness is found in the person of Jesus Christ. In God’s perfect sovereign timing in history God sent Jesus to bring his holiness to humanity. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ alone is the embodiment of the fullness of God on earth. Jesus is our only hope of rescue, and is not one choice among many in the pantheon of religious thought.

Despite culture’s pressure to enforce an idea of tolerance that denies any exclusive claims, the church cannot shirk from its responsibility to proclaim Christ alone as the hope of the nations. Christ is not an elective benefit to add to our supply of good things. He is not a moral reformer to make good people better. He alone is a Savior to make dead people alive. Eternity is at stake for the souls of every person we know and love. Our salvation and the salvation of our loved ones depend entirely on our response to the work of Christ. While under arrest, Peter proclaimed, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). God alone demands exclusive loyalty to him alone, to be shared with no other idols. God is holy. God is sovereign. A proper homiletic for preaching to an “iFaith” culture must maintain this theocentric view that refuses to shun God to the edges. God cannot be marginalized and must be affirmed as the center of all of mankind’s needs, hopes, and dreams. This leads us to our next major emphasis which is our culture’s infatuation with ourselves.

Response to the Autonomous Self

If truth is denied, and the Bible is rejected, and God has been moved to the margins of life, then it is only logical that humanity's default response is to place self at the center of life. French philosopher Voltaire is alleged to have written, "In the beginning God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since."²⁵ It must be stated at the outset that people are God's crowning creation made uniquely in the image of God, like no other creature. The Scriptures tell us, "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:26,27). "The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God."²⁶ Both the word for "image" "צלם (*tselem*)" and "likeness" "דמות (*demuwth*)" refer to something that is similar but not identical to the thing it represents. The number of ways we "image" or reflect our creator cannot be exhaustively presented in this paper, but suffice it to say that we represent our creator in having a conscious moral nature designed to live in relationship with our creator, and to serve Him as under-lords to have dominion over creation.

The relationship between man and God was forever changed at the fall of man when he sinned in the garden by eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3). The results were catastrophic, as it resulted in the expulsion from the garden, the certainty of death, and the spiritual separation of humanity from God. Since that time, man's natural inclination is to rebel against God, as every human is born with a sin nature that cannot help but disobey his creator. Paul describes it as follows: "Therefore, just as

²⁵ Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet), *Notebooks*, c.1735-c.1750, accessed September 8, 2016, <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Voltaire>.

²⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 442.

sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). The sad reality is that there is “none righteous, not even one; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:10, 23). We are now pre-disposed to sin because this very sin nature has been imputed to all of us. Hodge, following the Augustinian teaching of original sin writes, “To impute sin, in Scriptural and theological language, is to impute the guilt of sin. And by guilt is meant not criminality or moral ill-desert, or demerit, much less moral pollution, but the judicial obligation to satisfy justice. Hence the evil consequent on the imputation is not an arbitrary infliction; not merely a misfortune or calamity; not a chastisement in the proper sense of that word, but a punishment, *i.e.*, an evil inflicted in execution of the penalty of law and for the satisfaction of justice.”²⁷ Referred to as “total depravity” our distorted nature is now unable to please God on our own. “Man, since he was corrupted by the fall, sins not forced or unwilling, but voluntarily, by a most forward bias of the mind; not by violent compulsion, or external force, but by the movement of his own passion; and yet such is the depravity of his nature, that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil.”²⁸ Paul explains it thus to the Corinthians, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). The temptation from the very beginning carries the same false promise, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). This phrase “like God” is the Hebrew construction כְּאֱלֹהִים which is a

²⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960; orig. 1845; WordSearch electronic version 2007), 194.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion – Book 2*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960; WordSearch electronic version 2007), Chapter 3.

compound of the particle preposition כִּי (like, as, according to) with אֱלֹהִים for *Elohim*, God. Man's grasping for this knowledge is an attempt to usurp God as the all-knowing one. The lie is that if we can see and know as God sees and knows, then we no longer need God, and can rely on ourselves in true freedom. This false promise of freedom only leads to bondage and destruction. "For the knowledge of good and evil, which man obtains by going into evil, is as far removed from the true likeness of God, which he would have attained by avoiding it, as the imaginary liberty of a sinner, which leads into bondage to sin and ends in death, is from the true liberty of a life of fellowship with God."²⁹ This rebellion places mankind at enmity with God. "God opposes the proud, but give grace to the humble" (Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). Paul refers to this sinful nature as the living according to the "flesh" which is the Greek word "σάρξ (*sarx*)" which is composed of the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God. In writing to the Galatians Paul declares, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other" (Gal 5:17). While the authority of the flesh is broken upon conversion for the believer, its presence remains as something we must constantly resist by trusting in Christ's grace and power. Without vigilance and a focus on Christ, it is only natural for individuals to drift towards the influence of the flesh. Wells' theology recognizes the total corruption of human character because of sin. He laments of, "the powerful vision of a humanity corrupted by sin being released to stand before God in all his glory, gripped by the magnificent certainty of his truth."³⁰

²⁹ C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament – Volume 1: The Pentateuch*, WordSearch electronic version 2003), 58.

³⁰ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 185.

The correct response to the believer's awareness of this drift is enabled by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). The Greek word convict is ἐλέγχω (*elegcho*) which means to expose a sin, call one to account, refute, and unveils the wickedness of pride and the exaltation of self over God. Once made aware of our fault with the Spirit's empowering sense of dread of displeasing God, our response is repentance. The verb for repentance "μετανοέω (*metanoeo*)" means to change one's mind, direction and heart in abhorrence of sin. Repentance is required for salvation (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18, 17:30) but also is required by born-again believers who have strayed or drifted. We are in grave error when we act as consumers who need a product (God's forgiveness) to make us feel better about ourselves. We are not good people needing to be made better; we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The idea of a therapeutic self-oriented faith finds itself powerless because our best efforts are impotent to find this forgiveness within ourselves. We need to be changed – a change we cannot effect. This change can only come by repentance and turning from sin and self to Christ. For individuals, and for the church corporate, we must all be vigilant to avoid the drift to placing the self at the center, by keeping our eyes on Christ as supreme and central. With Christ on the throne, and self in its proper place as Christ's beloved child and servant, we can avoid the consumeristic and therapeutic pressure to view God as a commodity to take away our pain and make us feel better. God cannot and will not allow us to persist with self, or any of our smaller "gods" at the center of reality. "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deu 4:24).

The result of this repentance is to place self on the scaffold and correctly place God on the throne and at the center of our lives. The optimism of liberalism that views

mankind as inherently good came crashing down after two world wars. The therapeutic responses of psychology and proper technique have only resulted in greater fracturing of the self and rootlessness of today's highly complex world. As Wells notes, "without theology, worshipers have no reason to look beyond themselves, no reason to look out into the world beyond their shores."³¹ The awareness of God's holiness and of our sinfulness is the primary instrument to remove self from the throne. This results in a correct and accurate understanding of the placement of the self. As co-heirs with Christ, we affirm that God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:3). Thus we have a healthy and "sober" view of ourselves as sinners who have been saved by grace, and are now beneficiaries of all the blessings as the covenant children of God (Gal 3:29). Our place is living, loving, and serving our Heavenly Father whose authority guides and protects and affirms us as his children for his delight, and for his glory. To employ a proper homiletic to an "iFaith" society, we must constantly be on guard against a human-oriented perspective, as if God exists to serve us. We must constantly resist the pride to think of ourselves as central, and instead we should rightly perceive ourselves as children of a much bigger God at work in a much bigger world. With God on the throne, and self at his footstool, we find our proper place in the world, and discover the joy of living as we were designed. This leads us to our final section, the need for preachers to proclaim this very message of truth.

The Preacher's Response

Christ gave to the church the Great Commission of going and making disciples of the all nations, to baptize and teach them all that he commanded (Matt 28:18-20). As Wells notes, "There is no Christian faith in the absence of sound doctrine. It is this

³¹ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 295.

doctrine, or more precisely, the truth it contains and expresses, that was ‘taught’ by the apostles and ‘delivered’ to the Church. It is this message that is our only ground for hope and salvation.”³² In the book of Romans Paul makes a case for the primacy of the role of preaching. He quotes Joel 2:32 with the words, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). He then unpacks the logical outworking of this calling. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:14-15, 17). To “call upon” is the verb “ἐπικαλέομαι (*epikaleomai*)” which means to address, appeal, call with a trust and dependence. In a series of rhetorical questions in reverse order he outlines the process: Sending the preacher, then preaching of the gospel, then the hearing of the gospel, then the believing of the gospel, then calling out in faith, resulting in salvation. While God’s Spirit is the active agent who calls and sends, draws and saves, the human agent God utilizes is the proclamation of the message. The act of preaching is the word “κηρύσσω (*kerusso*)” which means to call out, proclaim, or herald God’s Word publicly. While the task of preaching is essential to the church fulfilling its mission, it is the pastors who are responsible to execute this plan in our corporate worship gatherings. Wells says this about the importance of preaching: “Wherever biblical religion has been recovered, the recovery of the teaching office is never far behind. Nor is the kind of biblical preaching the life and force of which is the truth of Scripture. And wherever this preaching takes root, there the desire to know and practice God’s truth begins to blossom.

³² Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 103.

And this is the soil, the only soil, in which theology can grow.”³³ Paul’s imperative to young Timothy stands as a model for all who are called to preach. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:1-2). That short phrase, “κήρυξον τὸν λόγον” (preach the word) rings through the centuries for all preachers as our primary task and purpose: to preach God’s Word. It is the Word of God that is powerful to change lives. This priority has weakened among the modern church and desperately needs to be recaptured. As Wells laments, “In the study, the evangelical pastor is now the C.E.O.; in the pulpit, the pastor is a psychologist whose task is to engineer good relations and warm feelings.”³⁴

While worship styles vary with cultures and times, and while preaching styles and models may be adapted to suite specific audiences, it is only the Word of God that carries the message that is powerful to transform lives. The nature of man and of God is unchanging. God is always holy, just, loving, and sovereign. Mankind is always sinful and in need of saving. It is the gospel message that is the unchanging answer to man’s dilemma. The late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote emphatically, “I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also.”³⁵ While fellowship, worship, service, and caring for the poor are all outworkings of the church’s calling, it is through God’s Word and the preaching of the good news of Christ that the power of God is unleashed.

³³ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 282.

³⁴ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 177.

³⁵ D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 9.

Preachers not only need to be clear *that* preaching is our primary task, but we should also have clarity on *what* we preach. Since it is God’s Word empowered by the Spirit that changes lives, we need to stay true to that word. Paul’s warning to Timothy urges, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Timothy is to “do his best” which is the imperative aorist active word “σπούδασον (*spoudason*)” which implies an urgency to make haste, exert one’s self, and make every effort with diligence, zealous and eager. The pastor’s effort is to be approved “δόκιμον (*dokimon*)” by God, which relates to the money changers who were to provide the full genuine weight in ancient coins, not shaving them off for additional profit.³⁶ Preachers must “rightly handle” the Scriptures. The phrase “ὀρθοτομέω (*orthotomeo*)” means literally to cut straight; hold a straight course, handle aright and teach correctly. It is my contention that expository preaching that clearly communicates God’s Word accurately, with solid exegesis while bringing God’s Word into twenty-first century culture is the truth and relevance to which preachers must aspire with all diligence. As Robinson warns preachers, “When they fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority. . . God speaks through the Bible. It is the major tool of communication by which he addresses individuals today. Something fills us with awe when God confronts individuals through preaching and seizes them by the soul. The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching.”³⁷ Whether expositing a specific section of Scripture as a topic, preaching through a book, or expositing a broad-themed review of a biblical character, God’s Word must be correctly handled and presented. In the Scriptures

³⁶ Donald Barnhouse, *The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon*, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/dokimos.html>.

³⁷ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 4.

we see the redemptive plan of God progressing through history (Vos).³⁸ We also see the shadows and types that lead us to the redemption in Christ-centered preaching (Chapell).³⁹ To stay true to the text we must be accurate in determining its big idea (Robinson).⁴⁰ Because God's Word includes his control and providential involvement through human history, we see this leading to the fulfilment of redemption found in Christ. Thus "rightly handling" God's Word in preaching must involve not only the correct big idea found in the exegesis of the text itself, it must be understood in light of its context and over-all canonical place in God's redemptive plan. This kind of preaching should find its logical connection to Christ and his redemption of mankind. This thesis-project contends that each sermon should be not only biblically accurate, but theologically sound, and Christologically connected.

Lastly, we must recognize it is not our preaching alone that changes lives, but it is God's Word, empowered by the working of His Spirit alone that transforms hearts. To the natural mind, this seems foolish. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21-24). It is God's wisdom to use human preaching as the instrument of transmission of his life-changing message, but it is never humans who enact the change, but God alone. God works through us human vessels, in spite of our frailty. To the Corinthians Paul declares, "having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart... we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:1,7). While God uses the preacher as the human instrument, he is not limited by the limitations of that instrument. Paul describes to the

³⁸ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1975).

³⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994, 2005).

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*.

Corinthians earlier, “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:3-5). This gives us great encouragement to know it is up to God’s Spirit, and God’s power to use his word preached from our pulpits. Our task is to correctly study and present God’s Word in all its glorious good news.

Pelton aptly warns us:

“If I’m not careful, I may begin to think that sermon effectiveness is the result of human effort alone. I may think that if I can simply make the right choice of topic in the study and choose the right words during the sermon, God will work. . . Apart from the need for creating a comprehensible message, relevance and effectiveness is determined more by the Holy Spirit’s activity than by human effort and evaluation.”⁴¹

It is God’s job to change lives with this precious gem. Our “iFaith” culture desperately needs courageous preachers who will proclaim God’s Word, carefully expositing its meaning and lovingly applying it for all to hear and live. A homiletic that employs the inclusion of doctrinal truth, rich theology and a high Christology is the antidote to our self-oriented therapeutic ways. The truth we have is a truth worth preaching, and is the only answer to the needs of the human heart.

Conclusion of Biblical and Theological Framework

Our homiletic must be grounded on the solid foundation of God as the ultimate source and creator of truth. The works of Wells serve as a critique of the loss of theology in much of today’s evangelical church. Wells provides a rather thorough analysis of the history and causes behind today’s postmodern ethos, with the resultant loss of truth,

⁴¹ Randal Pelton, *Preaching with Greater Accuracy: Finding Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching; Chapter One* (Electronic pre-published manuscript provided by Randal Pelton at GCTS D.Min. residency June 2014), 11.

marginalization of God, ascendancy of the autonomous self. Most of his work involves criticism with very little given in terms of specific corrective. His most recent work at the time of this writing, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World*, cites the need for an over-all embracing of God's holiness with his love, but again without many specifics. His criticism of the modern church is certainly well-founded, but I believe there is much hope and that God desires to do a new work in re-invigorating His bride. The lack of a specific homiletic response is the very reason for this project.

Today's highly mobile, ever-changing, technologically laden and information overloaded society is creating stresses upon people's lives in many ways. Liberalism holds no answers for our broken world. Neo-orthodoxy has a view of Scripture that I believe is too weak to provide the authority we need from a God who has spoken. The consumer oriented and market-driven approach to ministry is incomplete as a mere window dressing to the needs of broken humanity. I believe a robust, theologically sound and biblically consistent preaching system that applies these foundational truths should be a part of every preacher's arsenal.

As God is a self-revealing God, he has made it such that truth can be known by us, albeit in limited fashion, never to be exhausted by our finite understanding. Truth can be known as it is revealed in Jesus Christ and recorded in His Word. Our homiletic must major on God's truth.

The marginalization of God in our culture may be addressed by the understanding of the centrality of God as the sole creator, who has made everything for Himself. I believe we must employ a homiletic that maintains this theocentricity. While giving us a limited free will, he works through people and through nature, and through history to

accomplish his purposes for his ultimate glory. Christ is the supreme expression of God to mankind and is exclusively our only way to heaven and thus keeping us also Christocentric. God holds the universe together by the delight of his will and is thus always and forever at the center of all creation. He is actively sustaining it and bringing all things to ultimate subjection to his glory.

While we have all been made in the image of God, because of the fall and rebellion of man against his creator, our natural tendency is to put self on the throne, and at the center of life. I believe we must employ a homiletic that correctly identifies self as broken to the core and redeemed only by the atonement of Christ. It is in the miracle work of the Holy Spirit that the heart is warmed and opened to God and can receive his amazing offer of forgiveness paid for by the death of Christ.

Lastly, the issues of the reality of truth, the marginalization of God, and the problems of self at the center, all find their solution and redemption at the cross of Jesus Christ, and that message is transmitted primarily by preaching. A homiletic that counters the “iFaith” drift in our churches recognizes the critical role that preaching plays. While individual witnessing is a responsibility for every believer, it is the primary task of the pastor to equip all of the saints by preaching God’s Word, accurately handling it with skill and humility. The grace of God that saves sinners is the same grace of God that empowers preachers as imperfect vessels to be God’s agents and conduits to impart the life-altering power of the Word of God to His people, and the message to reach the lost all for the glory of God. The preaching of this message is the task of every preacher, and a priority for every church congregation until Christ returns. We must be biblical. We must be theological. We must be practical. We must be humble and submissive to God

himself as the giver of joy, peace, salvation and eternal life. Upon these cornerstones we may build a homiletic that can counter the “iFaith” drift in our churches, and lift up a new generation of believers with robust theology, honest Biblical exposition, and deeply practical application. At this point we now turn to the literary review of Wells’ writings as our foundational material.

CHAPTER THREE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE WRITINGS OF DAVID F. WELLS

The men of Issachar, who supported King David were described as “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do” (1 Chron 12:32). I believe it is incumbent upon all pastors to pursue the same clarity of understanding of our times in order to properly respond with the call of the gospel. Barth is attributed with saying that we should “hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”¹ I believe David F. Wells is one of the foremost writers to clearly articulate an awareness of the modern cultural influences that have weakened the evangelical church in America. Wells provides an incisive analysis of the historical causes of this cultural drift and has provided what many refer to as a bracing “wake-up call” to the church.

The following chapter is a literature review of the writings of Wells that provides a diagnosis of the causes of the deterioration of truth in today’s culture, and its erosive influence and weakening of doctrinal truth among believers. Wells asserts the need for a restoration to an emphasis upon God-centered robust, doctrinal truth in today’s churches. In the following chapter of this project I will propose what a homiletic response to these issues might look like. The specific books on which I focus include: *No Place for Truth* (1993); *God in the Wasteland* (1994); *Losing our Virtue* (1998); *Above All Earthly Pow’rs* (2005); *The Courage to be Protestant* (2008); and *God in the Whirlwind* (2014).

I will also include brief interactions with the writings of Os Guinness that complement an understanding of these same issues of the loss of truth in today’s culture, the power of the gospel to enact change, and recovering the art of biblical persuasion.

¹ James H. Gilmore, Christianity Today, “Time for Culture,” *Christianity Today*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2013/june-online-only/time-for-culture.html>.

The specific books to which I will refer include *Time for Truth* (2000), *Renaissance* (2014), and *Fool's Talk* (2015). It is my conviction that as we better understand our times, our culture, and the people to whom we minister, we can more effectively respond with the gospel of Christ in a way that can be both winsome and unapologetically truthful.

No Place for Truth

The first of Wells' books in my review, *No Place for Truth*, introduces the subject of the influences of modernity and postmodernity from an historical approach. The impetus of Wells' writing stems from his observed weakening of truth among the culture and its insidious influence upon the evangelical church. He states, "I have watched with growing disbelief as the evangelical Church has cheerfully plunged into astounding theological illiteracy."² The pastors, whose task is to broker the truth of God to the people of God, have "turned in upon themselves and substituted for the knowledge of God a search for the knowledge of self."³ Absolute truth has been replaced by relativism; the divine has been replaced by the human; the universal public scope of truth has been replaced by one's own private religious experience. The central purpose of this first book is to explore *why* theology is disappearing in the evangelical churches in America.

Wells tracks the effects of modernity upon America within the context of the small New England town of Wenham. In its earliest days, morality was a given in society and the Congregational church was its social center. Through the periods of spiritual ups and downs and the Great Awakening, faith had been a central informing aspect to society. With the birth of the modern age at the industrial revolution, society began to undergo a

² David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.

³ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 7.

sea-change. The population was growing; workers began to leave the farms for the cities. That which was permanent became transient. The birth of television opened up unheard of vistas of information across geography. The rapid development of technology changed the way people related, communicated, and thought. Americans began to become more “attuned to experience and to appearances, not to thought and character.”⁴ The utopian expectations of the Enlightenment ushered in the transformation of truth into a human-centered relativism. The rejection of authority saw the self as the new arbiter of defining reality. Modernity reached full-force with the enormous economic growth that resulted from the emergence of cities, manufacturing, and mass communication. The sacred was viewed with suspicion and secularism was ascending as the shaper of human relations and thought. The idea of an external, objective truth has become re-shaped where “the only authority that now remains is that of private experience.”⁵ Truth, like life, began to be compartmentalized and fractured into component parts that could be disassembled and re-evaluated. The major influence that has shaped modern culture includes the extended control over nature, distance and time that technology affords. Another influence is the informational flood of the mass media, which serves up innumerable cultures and ideas into everyone’s living room with equal emphasis. Depth of thought has been replaced by a breadth of experience resulting in information over-load. This has given rise to a tremendous reshaping of the inner psyche of both believers and unbelievers.

Wells addresses the influence of these forces upon the church. The loss of truth has resulted in what Wells calls the “therapeutic age.”⁶ The core elements of confession of doctrinal truth and reflection of that truth have been eviscerated and have reduced us to

⁴ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 32.

⁵ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 86.

⁶ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 101.

thought about the self. Scriptures exhort us to stand firm in, and to guard the truth of our faith, and not to “drift” but to become “established” in it, and to transmit this truth to succeeding generations (2 Tim 1:13-14; 4:3; Titus 1:9; Gal 1:9). Belief has not completely gone away; it has merely been moved to the periphery, away from the center of our existence. Believers are not falling into full-fledged apostasy, but have re-located doctrinal truth to the margins of life. Doctrinal language has been replaced by psychological language. Instead of accountability to God, we now find ourselves accountable to ourselves, with the drive to self-actualization taking precedence over growth in holiness. The effect upon the younger generations has been most profound. The emancipation from objective truth has left the young adrift in the sea of impersonal society with only the self as the compass. This results in a dependence upon others for affirmation and approval, through the surrogate family of peers.⁷ This resulting autonomy has resulted in growing loneliness and the loss of connectedness to history, truth, and society as a whole. The now ubiquitous presence of television and the internet has served to stifle thought and reflection to mere emotional entertainment. While the arrival of television and the internet have forever changed how we think and interact with the world, I do not believe it is all bad news. Despite Wells’ warnings of the harms of technology, it has also provided many gains. I would contend that it is our job to teach believers how to think critically and to wisely interact with the media and not merely cast stones at it.

The resultant effect of this loss of truth is a growing consumer culture finding its ways into the churches. “Credit cards allow us to have without having to wait; the message of the televangelists has been that we can likewise have divine results without

⁷ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 157.

having to wait – indeed without even having to think.”⁸ Wells describes how the *experience* of God upon our emotions is more important than the *truth* of God in his transcendence. I do not believe we are left with an “either-or” scenario, but that both truth and emotion are a part of life. In understanding this trend towards consumer religion, it is important for us to recognize the Scriptures give no such bifurcation between truth and emotion. While emotions may run afoul without self-control, they are nonetheless critical to a fully-orbed faith that not only knows and understands and obeys God’s ways, but allow us to “delight ourselves in the Lord” (Ps. 37:4).

In seeking to draw more people, many churches have focused so much on “felt needs” that the foundational needs of repentance, transformation, and holiness are seldom even spoken of. In seeking to bring people the relief for which today’s complex culture yearns, pastors have become CEO’s and resident psychologists whose job is to organize the church efficiently like a business, and help people feel better about themselves in relationships. What gets lost is the need that human effort, models, and systems can never meet: forgiveness that only the gospel provides. The old idea of self-denial has become the new immorality and self-indulgence has become the new gospel.⁹ With the expansion of pluralism and relativism encroaching upon the church, believers are not equipped with the theological framework to discern truth from error. The health and wealth prosperity gospel has found inroads in some megachurches across the land. Good and evil are reduced to a sense of well-being. Theology has become therapy. The biblical interest in righteousness has been replaced by a search for happiness; holiness by whole-ness; truth by feeling; ethics by feeling good about one’s self. The marginalization of truth has

⁸ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 174.

⁹ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 181.

resulted in the loss of the weight of the gospel, of truth, and of our very selves. “The powerful vision of a humanity corrupted by sin being released to stand before God in all his glory and converse with him, gripped by the magnificent certainty of his truth, is now dying. It is being edged out by the small and tawdry interest of the self in itself.”¹⁰

There is now a common bias or suspicion in many churches *against* doctrine and theology. The middle class has developed into what Wells calls “the rise of everyperson.” In an age looking for equality there is what Wells calls the middling with a strange conformity to each person doing his own thing, just like everyone else.¹¹ Every person’s view of truth, reality, and God has now been given equal validity. Christian leaders have been looking more to where a stream is flowing, rather than seeking to find where God’s truth leads. Faith is now a matter that must appeal more to feelings and intuition than to reason. In an effort to find significance in a culture that decries truth, pastors now struggle more to be “professionalized” and have forfeited or abandoned their fundamental task of being brokers of truth.¹² Success is measured more by attendance, finances, and organizational finesse than by theological integrity. Managerial competence in the church has come to dominate the definition of pastoral service. “It is not at all clear that churches expect the pastor to do anything more than to be a good friend.”¹³ Today, “the minister’s professional status rides not on his or her character, ability to expound the Word of God, or theological skill in relating that word to the contemporary world, but on interpersonal skills, administrative talents, and ability to organize the community.”¹⁴ Utility has now taken the place of truth. Technique is more important than character. According to a study

¹⁰ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 185.

¹¹ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 194.

¹² Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 221.

¹³ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 233.

¹⁴ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 234.

conducted by *Pulpit Digest* and *Preaching*, more than 80 percent of sermons analyzed were anthropocentric, and not theocentric.¹⁵ There is the need for a genuinely biblical God-centered ministry and pulpit that will collide head-on with the self-absorption of today's therapeutic, anthropocentric focus. Wells concludes that truth must be declared and preached as objective reality founded upon God's Word. It is a return to solid, doctrinal teaching of God's words as objective, external reality that will rescue modern faith from its marginalized position of today. There is an urgency of the need for a robust and reasonable faith based upon God's defined reality. "The human spirit is now being moved not by profound thinking but by the experience of living in a metropolis presided over by bureaucracy, tranquilized by television, and awash with the racket of clashing cultures."¹⁶ In today's compressed reality, "we have too much information, too many responsibilities, too much change, too many choices, and too many situations over which control has now slipped from our hands... This turbulent surf crashes unrelentingly into psyches too small and too fragile to withstand it."¹⁷

A recovery of the sense of awe and holiness of God is needed. The gospel can only be awakened when we realize that without the reality of God's holiness, our message is only another alternative in the self-help universe. The therapist's couch, the self-help seminar, or the mall can never answer the deep cries of the heart that are left unanswered by the weakness of modernity. Only an earnest return to solid, doctrinal truth can bring us to the God we need. While the content of this book presents an appropriately accurate and sober warning for all pastors in these dangerous times, the book tends to carry a mostly negative and worried tone. A helpful balance may be found from Wells'

¹⁵ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 252.

¹⁶ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 286.

¹⁷ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 287.

friend Os Guinness. In his book, *Renaissance*, Guinness reminds us that it is in looking back to Jesus himself, with humility and repentance, that the power of the gospel can never be shaken. We need only look to history's paradoxical lesson that the darkest hour is truly just before the dawn.¹⁸ From this introductory book about the causes of the loss of theology in the church, we now turn to Wells' next book in this series that addresses the importance of recovering the greatness and majesty of God as our center.

God in the Wasteland

In this second of the books in my list, *God in the Wasteland*, Wells begins to present the first step of corrective action to be taken in this loss of truth. In this volume Wells recounts the effects of capitalism, technology, urbanization and telecommunications as the significant forces of influence upon the American psyche. With a concise review of the history of liberal theology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, he chronicles the movement to a more conservative birth of modern evangelicalism. He cites the subsequent result of prosperity that gives birth to a growing sense of consumerism and a re-location of God from the center of society to the periphery, viewing faith as a matter of private and not public interchange. A civility with "the ubiquitous happy face" presents a friendly, but harmless God.¹⁹ In the attempt to meet the growing needs of people in a complex world, the churches have responded by "tinkering with its structures, its services, its public face... God is secondary to organization and image, the church's health lies in its flow charts, its convenience, and its offerings rather than in its inner life, its spiritual authenticity, the toughness of its moral

¹⁸ Os Guinness, *Renaissance - The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 130.

¹⁹ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland; The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 28.

intentions.”²⁰ As the church has focused on proper technique, efficient organization and relevant music, it has missed the fundamental problem which is that God, His truth, His grace, and His judgment have become irrelevant.²¹ As a result, God has been gradually pushed to the edges of life and man himself has claimed priority as the center of life.

With the weakening of truth, the value of learning among the clergy has fallen into public suspicion. This democratic flattening of the leadership has resulted in truth and intellectual debate being replaced with charisma and the ethos of being liked. Many in the church growth field have turned to business models, seeing the gospel as the product and the world as its customers. The church’s pastors are now judged not by teaching and biblical counsel but by their ability to run the church like a business. The modern successful pastor will resemble more of a C.E.O. than one whose gifts that Paul had in mind.²² Churches are set up more like shopping malls with a wide array of services and programs to meet the wide audience. Theology, and specifically, God, has been relegated to the sidelines. “It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant.”²³ While I don’t disagree with Wells, I contend that it is important to affirm the historic Protestant understanding of our equality in the priesthood of all believers. The democratizing of leadership should not necessarily sacrifice the proper sense of the authority of Christ and His Word. The meeting of felt needs is not bad in itself, in that Christ fed the hungry and healed the sick. While Christ had his “wide ministry” to the

²⁰ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 30.

²¹ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 30.

²² Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 73.

²³ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 88.

crowds, we should follow his lead in not catering *only* to the felt needs, but we should keep His saving truth of the gospel as central to our mission.

With the loss of truth and the weakening of God, we have witnessed the loss of the connected self. It is understandable that with the loss of faith and trust in authority due to the failures of modernity, that post-modernity has arisen with the self as the mediator of truth based upon feeling and experience. “The fragile self adrift in the relentless tumult of modernity inevitably begins to experience the weariness and emptiness to which post-modern writers... have so uniformly pointed.”²⁴ The loss of an external connection to truth and society has resulted in insecurity in the dismantling of the self. “When the consumer is sovereign, the product (in this case God himself) must be subservient.”²⁵ With the loss of external authority, especially the Bible and the church, the new authority is the self, informed by feeling, experience, or intuition. The new tolerance is the refusal to allow external reality to impose restraints upon the knower, thus emancipating the self from any external reality. The therapy of serving the self and pride is the new morality.

Wells turns next to the corrective action of a focus on the Outside God, embraced by a strong and passionate mind shaped by God’s Word of truth. The church must begin teaching afresh the reality of the *biblical God*, who was there before the world began, and stands outside, and transcendent of mankind; the God who is holy and unique. God must be presented as He is: one who is above all earthly existence. He is the God who sets boundaries, independent of our preferences. With God removed from the throne, the self tends toward a narcissistic preoccupation. The hypersensitivity to individual rights and

²⁴ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 94.

²⁵ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 101.

refusal to take responsibility for actions tends to lead to a sense of victimhood. We need to recapture the understanding that love is the expression of God's holiness, and not in conflict with it. With this comes the claim that God's holiness carries the demand of exclusive loyalty to him. God alone is holy. And his holiness goes hand in hand with tenderness.²⁶

With the economic growth in our culture of abundance, the church has come to refashion itself into institutions better suited to satisfy the demands of consumers. But a growing emptiness has followed as the drive to fill felt needs has led to the loss of the doctrine of providence and the doctrine of the cross. In attempting to fill outward desires, the church has left people empty of the content of a faith that answers the deep cry of the heart. This emptiness is grasping for relief and results in more pluralization by way of the random, fracturing intake of knowledge without a center to order it.²⁷ We need to recapture the understanding of God's sovereign control over all things, and recognize that He is active in the grand scheme of history. That sovereign control finds its ultimate meaning in the cross. The world's offenses are decisively confronted and atoned for in Christ's death. We now live in between the inauguration of Christ's kingdom of his first coming and the consummation of that kingdom at his return. "It is essential that the church grasp the implications of the fact that it lives in the interim time."²⁸

Wells then addresses the need for biblically informed and passionate pastors of the churches of the future. In a study of seminary students he found that many seek to find meaning in the self rather than in Christ, through a process of inner discovery, self-

²⁶ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 138,139.

²⁷ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 158.

²⁸ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 173.

help, self-satisfaction and self-discovery.²⁹ The self is felt to be as important as putting others first. There is a preference for divine immanence over divine transcendence. I believe pastors should equally embrace God's immanence and His transcendence. We need to discard the exaggerated interest on image and seek to discover and live by the substance of our faith. It is the content of doctrinal and theological truth that can provide the answers to the heart's cry. Today's post-modernism promotes a self that is "typically shallow, self-absorbed, elusive, leery of commitments, unattached to people or place, dedicated to keeping all options open, and frequently incapable of either loyalty or gratitude."³⁰ This has resulted in a strange contradiction. On one hand, being wracked by insecurity, people seek to feel in control by the use of technology. And yet, on the other hand, people are unwilling to accept the limitations of life and tend to believe in what is deeply irrational. The flood of technological advancement and communication has resulted in the disconnection from the real world and is "producing a complete triumph of the sensate over the cognitive... The post-modern mood is essentially nihilistic, no longer looking for meaning."³¹ In review of this book, Eric J. Miller applauds Wells' attempt to offer more solutions to modernity shaped problem in Christianity, but claims a failure to elucidate what this Christ-culture relationship should be."³² Miller is also concerned whether Wells is suggesting that culture is incapable of being changed by the power of God due to the overbearing evil of modernity's impact. In light of Wells' solemn warnings, we are encouraged to find welcome hope as Os Guinness claims a positive

²⁹ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 201.

³⁰ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 217.

³¹ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 220.

³² Eric J. Miller, *Trinity Journal*, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Volume 16, 1995, 250.

“yes” to the transformational power of the gospel in his book *Renaissance*, to which I will refer later in this chapter.

In response to this, the church must stand steadfastly counter-cultural to this influence. “It must give up self-cultivation for self-surrender, entertainment for worship, intuition for truth, slick marketing for authentic witness, success for faithfulness, power for humility, a God bought on cheap terms for the God who calls us to a costly obedience. It must, in short, be willing to do God’s business on God’s terms.”³³ The next book to which we turn addresses the need to recover our moral center.

Losing Our Virtue

In Wells’ third installment of his tetralogy, *Losing Our Virtue*, he seeks to understand and explain the loss of our moral center and to address why the church must recover its moral vision. In typical Wells fashion, he concisely presents the historical drift from the early church days of Augustine and displays the parallels with the fall of the Roman Empire with that of modern America. He shows the effects of modernity in the loss of a moral center based upon character to a values-based center focused on personality.

The book begins with the contrast of two kinds of spirituality. The first type he labels “classic spirituality” which is part of the biblical Reformation heritage of our past. The second type he names “postmodern spirituality,” where truth and morality are replaced by intuition and self-actualization. The main differences are not confessional, but internal in their reference point. The classic spirituality is God-center and cross-focused and derives its authority from the external truth of God himself. Sin and conversion are weighty issues because of the recognized transcendence and holiness of

³³ Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 223.

God. In contrast, the postmodern spirituality is more psychological, experiential, and therapeutic in seeking to alleviate our discomfort. Today there is a focus on the immanence of God over the transcendence of God. He writes that this “psychologizing of sin and salvation” has a subversive effect on our moral understanding, particularly as it relates to God’s holiness.³⁴ The result is a more mystical, experiential faith that becomes deeply privatized and separated from the truth of God’s Word. What we tend to think about ourselves begins to influence what we think about God. In the wake of this self-oriented experiential spirituality we find the loss of biblical answers to modern life. He warns that without a change of direction, this infatuation with mimicking the world’s answers to life will soon “be seen to be the hollow charade, the empty mirage that it is. The happy campers in modernity’s playground are blithely unaware that this is a dangerous neighborhood.”³⁵ J. Daryl Charles retorts that Wells presents an incomplete view of virtue and should draw not only from the sixteenth century, but should also include the broader apostolic tradition of the early creeds, councils and writings of the fathers of the church.³⁶ It is wise for us to include biblical reflection of “classic spirituality” that includes the teachings of the Reformers as well as the earlier church fathers.

The next issue Wells addresses is the loss of a sense of moral guilt or embarrassment in our relationships. The pressure of secularization has removed the transcendent to be replaced by the personalized, autonomous self. The new ethic is the internal ethic of the self – what is right for me. No longer do we ask about morality, we

³⁴ David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue; Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 43.

³⁵ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 52.

³⁶ J. Daryl Charles, “Losing Our Moral Theology”, Books in Review, January 1999, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9901/reviews/charles.html>.

simply ask about legality. An expressive individualism is now driven by a deep sense of entitlement that refuses to take personal responsibility. Character becomes the casualty with the “emancipation from values, from community, and from the past in order to be oneself, to seek one’s own gain.”³⁷ Everything that is not illegal is now morally permissible. So today, litigation and regulation must now do what civility, self-restraint, honesty, and charitable character concern once did.³⁸ The loss of moral principle has left no other recourse than the court, which also leads to a loss of moral responsibility and promotes a culture of victimhood.

Wells describes the loss of a moral center which causes us to seek to save ourselves, seeking to find the healing within us. With the economic prosperity, technological advancements, and communication now available, we are inundated with choices. But the plethora of choices has not helped us, but has hindered us, and “the very reality of choice robs us of contentment over the paths we have taken.”³⁹ This has resulted in a shallow channel-surfing focus on instant gratification in search of utopian consumer satisfaction. The emergence of the shopping mall provides the new social center of finding fulfillment, and is matched by the emphasis upon having the right appearance, image, and healthy body. We are now fascinated by what is stunning, attractive, glitzy, glowing in our search for meaning. With this pursuit of more stuff and experiential capital, we are losing the old Protestant ethos of self-denial and hard work for the thrill of instant gratification. Moral limitation, self-sacrifice and self-control are seen as outdated and even morally wrong in place of the new morality of self-expression,

³⁷ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 67.

³⁸ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 75.

³⁹ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 87.

self-gratification and self-fulfillment.⁴⁰ This has resulted in a vague sense of dis-ease.

“Dissatisfaction, like a fog, seeped into all the nooks and crannies of their life. They often had a pervasive feeling of emptiness.”⁴¹ Wells contends that the new healers that offer us salvation are the therapists and the advertisers. This secularized form of salvation looks to finding self-actualization in therapy and happiness from buying the right product, the right experience. “Our advertisers have therefore become the priesthood of our prosperity.”⁴²

He then charts how the old thinking of guilt and accountability before a holy God has now been replaced by the sense of shame. The difference between the two is that guilt is related to God, and shame is about how other people see me, with self as the center. Because of the loss of a transcendent reference point of God, sin loses its weightiness. The difficulties of life and sorrow we face for our choices are now a matter of feelings of shame to be managed. This shame is more about us and how we feel exposed and embarrassed in front of others, and less about our standing before the holy God.

The next point Wells addresses is the contradiction between our commitment to be moral-free people independent of God, and the ongoing human creative part of us that has a hunger for justice and equity. The conscience we each carry belies the self-directed values of postmodernity with no answers forthcoming. We are rootless, weightless, answer-less but still carrying the unrest and dissatisfaction of our self-made world.

This leads us to the potential that the Christian faith has in today’s culture. As the world continues to press for the removal of the idea of sin, the ills of society and of the

⁴⁰ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 99.

⁴¹ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 107.

⁴² Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 114.

individual continue to increase. With the pressure of society to feel good about ourselves, our narcissism keeps us thinking more *of* ourselves than we really are, and more *about* ourselves than about external reality. This contraction into self has resulted in the growth of intellectual pride even to the point of self-deification.⁴³ For the church to make a difference and provide answers, Wells concludes we must re-capture the idea of sin as the offense against a holy God. It is not to us, but to God, that we are accountable. And the church must be morally authentic. We must actually live what we say we believe. “This spiritual yearning and the inability of human nature to live comfortably in a world evacuated of meaning, is the best Christian “point of contact” with postmodern culture.”⁴⁴ In today’s therapeutic culture where happiness is marketed and healing is sought within the self, the church has a great opportunity to stand faithful in proclaiming the truth of God, of Sin, and of true forgiveness. Despite society’s rejection of morality, moral reality keeps intruding into our experiences and the threads of moral existence continue to leak to the surface. This truth of the eventual failure of mankind and the self can provide the possibility for the truth of the gospel to be considered.

With a brief look at the distortions of the positive attitude emphasis of the Crystal Cathedral, and the marketing approach of the Seeker-Driven movement, Wells warns that the church attempting to be like the world is not the answer. With the consumer drive for uplifting, exciting, fun, inspirational time, many churches aim for people to emerge feeling better about themselves and their prospects. The downside is they can lack depth of the reality of God, sin, and His redemption. Wells refers to this market-driven

⁴³ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 187.

⁴⁴ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 194.

approach to ministry as being “in captivity to his idolatry of the self.”⁴⁵ The most urgent need in the Church today is the recovery of the gospel as the Bible reveals it. It is to present sin as moral failure before God, and the cross as the only means of finding relief and forgiveness. The only way the love of self can be exchanged for a love of God is through believing the Gospel. The church must find the courage to recover both the language and the understanding of sin, the cross, and the only hope the Gospel provides.

Wells may overstate the dangers of marketing, as Rick Warren would contend that marketing may simply be good communication of our message to attract a crowd. Warren would say “you don’t have to use gimmicks or compromise your convictions to gather a crowd. You don’t have to water down your message.”⁴⁶ Entertainment as an end in itself is misplaced, but our worship services should unashamedly express the same commitment to excellence that God demanded of the tabernacle worship in Exodus. And joy should be a part of our worship if it is to be biblical. As Jim Rayburn, founder of Young Life boldly claimed, “Christ is the strongest, grandest, most attractive personality to ever grace the earth. But a careless messenger with the wrong method can reduce all this magnificence to the level of boredom It is a crime to bore anyone with the gospel.”⁴⁷ The truth need not be boring, but the gospel is a compelling message when spoken with love to the true needs of humanity. Our presentation of truth should always be seasoned with the flavor of compassion and joy that is so richly found in our Savior. “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be

⁴⁵ Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 203.

⁴⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 207.

⁴⁷ Denny Rydberg, “Wising Up – Letters to the Editor.” *Christianity Today*, September 7, 2012, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/september/letters-to-the-editor.html>.

full” (John 15:11). From this book we now turn to the fourth of Wells’ series that addresses the centrality of Christ in our modern world.

Above All Earthly Pow’rs

The over-all aim of Wells’ fourth book under review is to address how the church should present Christ in today’s world so heavily influenced by postmodernism and religious pluralism. This volume begins with a review of the effects of the Enlightenment, and how the growth of modern technology, urbanization, capitalistic production and consumption, and psychology set the perfect breeding ground for a modern ideology of man’s freedom from the past, freedom from God, and freedom from authority.⁴⁸ As a result, God has been pushed to the margins and faith is to be strictly privatized in light of the new self-conscious autonomous being. History has shown that the Enlightenment promised more than it could deliver. As a result, we have witnessed the disappearance of God, the disappearance of a biblical view of human nature, and a belief in the omniscience of the human being. This has resulted in a thoroughly anthropocentric outlook. With the urbanization and individualism that resulted came a loss of connection to family, things that are lasting, eternal, and enduring. Life became a throw-away experience of that which is always shifting, faddish, fleeting, and ephemeral.⁴⁹

The apparent unstoppable progress of modernity has now hit hard times with the rejection of optimistic human progress being replaced by postmodernism. In postmodernity “the autonomous being refuses to be fettered by any objective reality

⁴⁸ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 29.

⁴⁹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, 43.

outside of itself.”⁵⁰ The hopes for a brighter future and better world that modernity and technology promised began to sour in time. After two world wars, countless holocausts, and the end of the myth of continual progress, society is turning more to a nihilistic outlook that views the world as meaningless and that meaning may be found in the self, outside of rationalism. The loss of hope in human achievement, and the rejection of a connecting metanarrative have resulted in privatized worldviews where absolute truth is rejected and morality is a matter of one’s own interpretation. One of the great values in the new postmodern culture is *choice*. This includes not only the choices of countless consumer items to purchase, but also choices in the world of ideas, all in a state of flux. In place of the steadfast hope of rationalism is a new expectation of volatility, obsolescence, rapid passing of ideas, disappearance of stability and constant change.⁵¹

With the loss of objective meaning and the fragmentation of self came a resurgence of spirituality in search for a meaning beyond the self. However, this new spirituality has been influenced by the expansion of immigration into our country. With the world now in our neighborhood, new vistas of religious thought are considered and a new privatized, custom designed spirituality can be had by adopting any variety of various religions to suit one’s private faith needs. People may now shop at the smorgasbord of ideas and pick and choose from all ideas without having to defend a cohesive or consistent rationale or worldview. Religion is now out, but spirituality, in the highly privatized and eclectic form is the essence of the new spiritual quest. Good and Evil do not have real status but are dissolved into “good and bad feelings.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr’s*, 68.

⁵¹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr’s*, 77.

⁵² Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr’s*, 119.

In light of this reality, Wells presents how Christ is the answer to the unanswered yearnings of this postmodern spirituality. With the loss of ultimate right and wrong there is a felt loss of something transcendent. This has resulted in a loss of the “agape” love of a God who is outside and reaches down to us with the embrace of the “eros” god which is internal, private, and therapeutic and about self reaching up to God.⁵³ This thought has resulted in a sense of alienation from “the artificial environment we have built in our soulless cities; the mindless repetition of the modern workplace, the cruelty of the economic tides which flow in and out without regard to human suffering, the numbing effect of bureaucracy, and the impersonal tenor of human relations in a society that values specialized functions over the people themselves.”⁵⁴ Instead of fulfillment, there is more anxiety, more loneliness, more meaninglessness, and a deeper sense of having been uprooted from family, place, and work. The privatized faith of the self must surrender to the public and objective revelation of Christ’s atonement as our only answer.

In the following chapter Wells presents Christ as the answer to the despair of today’s postmodernism. The focus of a therapeutic self-centered spirituality has not provided human freedom, but has resulted in a greater sense of the meaninglessness that Nietzsche saw so clearly.⁵⁵ If there is no ultimate reality, then the logical result, according to Camus, is suicide.⁵⁶ Luxury, plenty, entertainment, recreation, sex and drugs have not answered the soul’s craving for meaning but have only served to numb this reality. “The vanity, emptiness, and futility of fallen reason are the affliction visited upon sinners by God’s judgment... What the postmodern world celebrates in its rejection of all

⁵³ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 159.

⁵⁴ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 146.

⁵⁵ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 181.

⁵⁶ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 182.

absolutes and in its assumed right to define all reality privately is a sign of God's wrath."⁵⁷ The imputation of our sins to Christ and his righteousness to us is the only real answer to the emptiness of the soul. "It was in Christ, with all of his painful demands of obedience, not comfortable country clubs that early Christianity was about."⁵⁸ It was what God had done in space and time in Christ that transformed lives in the past; not the multiplication of programs, strobe lights, entertainment or slick drama. Images we may desire, but it is the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen that is the Church's truth to tell.⁵⁹ In response to Wells, I do not believe the use of drama and technology necessitates the removal of Christ's gospel message. Certainly God used the prophets to "dramatize" his message (Ezekiel, Hosea, etc.). Christ's parables employed drama, the unexpected plot twists, and even the ridiculous (camel through the eye of a needle). The use of technology and drama may be helpful, but only as long as the gospel remains central.

Wells then goes on to show how Christ alone is the answer to the decentered nature of postmodernity. Wells describes us as a "Confetti Generation." With the flashing media images and flood of information, our experience is like a blizzard of rootless, context-free thoughts and pictures, which make everything seem unconnected, random, unrelated, and uncentered.⁶⁰ With the deluge of choices that overwhelm us on a daily basis, there is a loss of weightiness of life with a blurring of every idea being no truer than another. This search for freedom within the self is really about how we can be in *control* in a world that appears to be merely random. Since there is no authority outside of self, no meaning to which we can cling, and no God to correct our errors, we are "but

⁵⁷ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr's*, 202.

⁵⁸ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr's*, 231.

⁵⁹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr's*, 232.

⁶⁰ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr's*, 235.

the pieces of confetti that flutter down, each on its own erratic course, none joined to the others, none connected, but each making its own solitary way through the air.”⁶¹ It is only in Christ that coherent reality can be rediscovered.

Wells then addresses the church’s attempts to reengineer how we “do church” with the seeker-sensitive movement pioneered by Willow Creek Community Church. In an attempt to recapture relevance to our society, Wells has argued that more effort is placed upon our techniques than upon the content of our faith. He claims a weakness of this movement is a mistaken view that man is seeking God by his own power, and the thinking that if we can remove all obstacles, then many will come to faith. Instead of seeing the world composed of lost people in need of forgiveness, it tends to view people as “customers” who are our “market” and our product is a God who wants to meet their felt needs. Instead of bringing people to a robust and strong faith in the sovereign God, Wells claims it has encouraged “fallacious assumptions about human potential, by a sense of entitlement to wholeness, by an almost sacrosanct assumption about consumer sovereignty.”⁶² This has resulted in a Disney World model where people are our “guests” and the promise that if we can provide a clean, bright, optimistic, fun environment then lives will be changed. Many churches have adopted this approach and have the mistaken idea that the key to success is complete managerial control, considerable imagination, and technological wizardry.”⁶³ In this seeker-sensitive megachurch movement there has emerged a place where “seekers become consumers, pastors become business tycoons, churches become marketing outlets, the gospel becomes a product, faith becomes its purchase, and increasingly the outcome in people’s lives is no different than if they had

⁶¹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr’s*, 250.

⁶² Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr’s*, 271.

⁶³ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powr’s*, 273.

made any other purchase.”⁶⁴ Christ cannot be bought or purchased as a commodity to actualize the self. In response to this critique, one could argue that not all churches have compromised the message for pragmatic consumerism. Rick Warren would argue that Saddleback Church may have one of the highest per capita levels of involvement in his congregation of people who engage in small groups, memorize Scripture, share their faith, and work on the mission field. He claims that the Purpose Driven strategy is not a church growth strategy but a spiritual maturity strategy.⁶⁵ With now over 45,000 people having been baptized and growing in his ministry, we see that being seeker-sensitive is not the same as being seeker-driven. Warren would argue that his ministry is all about Christ-centered life change.

Wells concludes this book with a call to biblical authenticity. The church must get its house in order, and we must extract ourselves from a self-oriented therapeutic consumerism and begin to believe and live out the truth of Christ. The church has been most influential in those moments when its contrition reached down deeply into its soul, and sought to live by God’s truth, on His terms and when it sought to proclaim that truth to the world in love. Today provides an extraordinary opportunity to present a meaning, a center, a purpose, and connection far greater than anything we can find within ourselves. It is at this point that perhaps Wells could have given greater emphasis to lead us from discouragement to the genuine hopefulness to live in these days of opportunity. Following this fourth in a series we now turn to Wells’ follow-up summary volume of this critique of a church gone off-course.

⁶⁴ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 297.

⁶⁵ Rick Warren, “Pastor Rick Warren Celebrates Historic Milestone: An Amazing Moment in the Life of the Church.” *FaithWire*. October 17, 2016, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.faithwire.com/2016/10/17/pastor-rick-warren-celebrates-historic-milestone-an-amazing-moment-in-the-life-of-the-church>.

The Courage to be Protestant

This book was written as a summary of the above-referenced four-book critique of modern American Christianity and how we are to respond in engaging the culture without sacrificing our doctrinal distinctives. The first chapter is a shortened version of *No Place for Truth*. In it he reviews the history of classical evangelicals with our commitment to the full authority of Scripture and the necessity and centrality of Christ's penal substitution.⁶⁶ However, in an effort to be inclusive as evangelicals, doctrine began to lose its central prominence and unity became more important than truth. The cultural influence of individualism upon the church has resulted in a self-styled individualistic faith that rejected the need for a corporate church life. In response to reach the unchurched, the marketing approach of the seeker-sensitive megachurch movement focused on style, technique and methodology. However this emphasis tended to under-emphasize doctrine and truth and resulted in an anemic and shallow faith with a subsequent lack of doctrinal or moral cohesion. The church finds itself in great need to be set free of the consumeristic, therapeutic self-orientation to the truths of God's Scripture, Christ's redemption, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone to the glory of God Alone.

Wells critiques the marketing of faith among churches by adopting the business model of technique and methodology. In this model the unchurched are the "customer" and the gospel is the "product." In a genuine attempt to be relevant and engage the culture, however, the result was to conceal the hard parts of Christian truth to those that are more pleasant and palatable. This resulted in the development of born-again churchgoers who neither know biblical truth nor live by it. A focus on the benefits of our

⁶⁶ David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 5.

faith took precedence over the need to correct our sin against a holy God. Oddly enough the studies indicated that the truly unchurched who have come to church and fully engaged the biblical faith were looking for preaching, doctrine, and truth over the packaging of the worship service.⁶⁷

Wells next reviews the subject of truth in a world that rejects its very notion. With the rejection of God and absolute truth, modern society has turned to a self-defining arbiter of reality. Even in the postmodern's commitment to community we see that community is sought for personal, individual reasons. With the urbanization and breakdown of the family, there emerged a decentering and orphan reality to culture. Despite our abundance humanity has been "hollowed out" by the lack of meaning.⁶⁸ The ongoing individualism remains inward-focused lending itself to the therapeutic view of life – seeking relief from problems. Scripture may be modified by how we "read" it. In contrast to postmodern and emergent thought, the Bible speaks across the ages, across the generations, and across psychological divides.⁶⁹ The drift and acquiescence of the church has presented an enfeebled Christianity that is more about feeling better about ourselves, how to overcome difficulties, how to have better relationships, but is not about truth.

The book subsequently discusses the place of God in our lives. With the removal of God at the center of our lives being replaced by the self at the center, we have lost any firm reference point of reality. With evil and sin being perceived as a privatized perception of that which causes us harm, we have lost the sense of accountability to an objective truth. "In the absence of a compelling external authority that enables us to draw the line confidently between right and wrong, true and false, we are left to fumble about

⁶⁷ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 55.

⁶⁸ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 67.

⁶⁹ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 81.

with only our feelings to guide us.”⁷⁰ The culture has become infatuated with an “inside God” on the immanence of his presence in our experience, but with a disregard and rejection of the “outside God” who is transcendent and above us. This deeply subjective, non-moral, individualistic and relativistic way of thinking is insistently therapeutic in nature.⁷¹ The response needed by the church is to center back on the gospel of a holy, transcendent God who gave His Son to restore us back to a genuine intimate and immanent relationship with Him.

Wells addresses the self having become the center of our lives. Meaning, purpose, and significance are to be found within the individual. This has resulted in the shift from thinking about the virtues of moral behavior to preferring personal values of opinion. Personality and image take precedence over character. The downside of this self-orientation is “that this constant taking of internal inventory only reinforces our natural self-centeredness and self-absorption.”⁷² Adversity is now seen as an interruption in our pleasure seeking, and a “rude disruption of our opportunities and our sense of calm.”⁷³ Another shift is that the idea of guilt has been replaced with the idea of shame. We need the corrective focus away from self to the standards of God. We cannot accomplish our self-mastery through the proper technique, but only as we see ourselves as we truly are: sinners in need of reconciliation to a holy God against whom we have rebelled. The self movement is about feeling good about ourselves, being therapeutic and non-moral.⁷⁴ Rather than *feeling* good about ourselves, the gospel helps us *become* good by God’s grace. Without a moral strength to empower obedience to the unenforceable, we are only

⁷⁰ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 107.

⁷¹ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 123.

⁷² Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 161.

⁷³ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 161.

⁷⁴ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 170.

left to that which is legal. Without objective morality, litigation and libertarianism are the only options available.

Wells then contrasts the pagan and the Christian perspectives of the person and role of Christ. The pagan viewpoint is about man reaching up to find God from below. Today's postmodern thought carries many of the ancient themes of paganism. The churches have attempted to conform to this idea by forgetting the basic sin nature of man that makes it impossible for people to seek God. This thinking has resulted in a rejection of religion as the idea of God reaching down to us, with a replacement of a new spirituality of us reaching up to God. In contrast, the biblical view proclaims Christ coming down to us in the incarnation, and His sacrificial atonement is given to save a humanity that cannot save itself. Biblical faith affirms that "God is the God of wrath and love, judgment and mercy, and each of these is simply another facet of his holiness."⁷⁵ While postmoderns place a premium on images, on imagination, and on relationships in community, our felt hunger can only be satisfied by the truth proclaimed about Christ and his gift of atonement. And it must be seen lived out in authenticity.

Wells concludes the book with a brief review of evangelicalism's current weaknesses, the nature of the church, and a challenge of the church to return to doctrinal integrity and its reason for existence. He cites the drift of the church to a "middling standard" that focuses on a "minimalistic, gray, and average the lowest common denominator" in ministry. This has resulted in the "triumph of appeal over depth, of technique over truth, and of consumption over cost."⁷⁶ In contrast, Wells affirms the visible and invisible nature of the church, that being local and universal. He cogently

⁷⁵ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 200.

⁷⁶ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 212, 213.

defends the marks of authenticity of God's true church found in the sufficiency of the Word of God with strong doctrinal preaching. He also asserts the need for the proper application of the sacraments as signs but not substitutes for the gospel of grace. Discipline is the third aspect of our authenticity that helps us maintain doctrinal and moral purity within the congregation. At the core of this is the understanding of the absolute holiness of God and our accountability to Him. The book ends with a strong and insightful foundational commitment to the sovereignty of God, our complete inability to accomplish his work on our own strength, and the promise that God alone will grow His church. It is not about the proper technique – we are all mastered by God who is infinitely more important than managerial know-how.⁷⁷ The church must hold fast to these truths to remain faithful and viable to a world in need of our message. As with much of Wells' writing on this subject, most of the emphasis has been upon analyzing the problem, with less emphasis upon the solution. Despite the mostly negative tone of these five books, I am convinced that the warnings of the evangelical church losing its message are well-founded. From these prophetic and somber warnings of a church gone askew, Wells then treats us to a more positive answer in his book *God in the Whirlwind*. It is to this book that we now turn, which directs us to a profoundly biblical and yet hope-filled answer of finding God's holiness firmly connected to His love.

God in the Whirlwind

This book takes Wells' accumulated analysis and critique of the evangelical church and seeks an application of focus on the dual virtues of God's holiness and love. He calls this the "holy-love" of God. In typical fashion, he begins the book describing our current state, the "where we are." He describes our focus upon self, the loss of truth, the

⁷⁷ Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 247.

marginalization of God, and the therapeutic version of faith on self-fulfillment. Despite modernity's unprecedented largesse, we have greater depression, anxiety and confusion about life. "Their self-esteem is high but their self is empty."⁷⁸ The God as our Concierge⁷⁹ has left us empty of the content of a robust understanding of God's character. This book is about how to teach and proclaim God's *holy-love*.⁸⁰ This book presents the indivisible nature of God's holiness and God's love being fully united with each other in Christ as the answer to mankind's greatest need.

Wells takes us through a review of redemptive history. We find the beginnings of grace and faith with Abraham and are carried down to the coming of Christ. Through the faltering of the church in the middle ages the Reformation awakened the biblical truths of regeneration as a work of God by God's grace alone. The unique nature of Christ is seen in light of Adam's fall, the Exodus of Israel, the monarchy of David, and finding its culmination in the initiation of the new covenant in Jesus.

Wells first addresses the love as part of God's character. Our first problem in understanding God's love is our assumptions based upon our limited intuitions and experiences. We tend to make these projections from our own selves, from below. But God's love comes down to us in condescension from *above*. His love comes to us in the midst of absolute holiness. "He is simultaneously loving and holy in such a way that we never encounter his love without his holiness or his holiness without his love. Indeed his love is an expression of his holiness."⁸¹ We see His love revealed in the Old Testament in his choice of Israel not predicated on anything they had done. The infinite generosity of

⁷⁸ David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind, How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 23.

⁷⁹ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 23.

⁸⁰ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 34.

⁸¹ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 86.

the incarnation of Christ was an amazing expression of that holy-love. The patience of God with Israel, and the kindness of God is what lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In Christ we see his loving-kindness and goodness made explicit in a way that far exceeds what was known in the Old Testament.⁸²

From here Wells then presents the holiness of God's nature as part of this holy-love. Rather than viewing God's holiness from our therapeutic lenses, we need to see it as God's moral perfection. "Holiness in God is everything that set him apart from the sinful creation, and it is everything that elevates him above it in moral splendor."⁸³ Instead of a human-centered small God who exists to serve our needs, the biblical view sees God outside of us, and transcendent above our low thoughts. Instead of the therapeutic vision of God's holiness as a truth we discover within, it is a moral issue of God's perfection in contrast to our stubborn sinfulness. This majestic otherness of God recognizes his power, beauty and splendor above anything of His creation. We cannot understand our own sin unless we clearly see and understand his holiness. In God "there are no greys... God's goodness is pure blazing white, and Satan's evil is unrelieved, horrible blackness."⁸⁴ God's holiness points to the cross where righteous judgment and grace come together. Love demands rescue. Holiness demands judgment. It is on the cross where the demands of each are resolved.⁸⁵ God does not exist to be used by us or to satisfy our therapeutic needs. It is his commandment to be holy which is greater than our desire to be happy.⁸⁶

Next Wells addresses how the holy-love of God relates to the atonement. It is on the cross that we find the mysterious exchange that took place in Christ's death, an

⁸² Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 98.

⁸³ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 103.

⁸⁴ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 117.

⁸⁵ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 121.

⁸⁶ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 127.

exchange of our sin for his righteousness.⁸⁷ It was God's sovereign decree for Christ to be betrayed by Judas, and for Jesus to die in our place as an innocent sacrifice. Our sins were laid upon Christ at the cross, and his righteousness was imputed to us by his grace through faith. "The prerogative to forgive, pardon, and restore our relation with God rests wholly with him."⁸⁸ Christ took our penalty, stood in our place, and paid the price. "He overcame our sin, God's wrath, and our captivity to Satan's designs"⁸⁹

Wells turns to the issue of our ongoing sanctification as those living under God's holy-love. Upon our salvation we are united with Christ, and no longer belong to ourselves. We are separated from sin and our self-nature, and are separated to God for His purposes. As we "work out our own salvation" (Phil 2:12), we are the recipients of his grace, as he works in our willing and in our working. The great commandment of loving God and loving our neighbor are both expressions of the holy-love of God. "Legalism and antinomianism, in their different ways, damage the Christian life because they undo the connections between love and holiness."⁹⁰ Without God's love, holiness would be incomplete. Without his holiness, love would be indifferent to sin. It is the strong fibers of love that sustain and empower the virtues of character. Rather than trying to fit our faith into the world, God's holy-love drives us closer to Him, and away from the world's way of thinking. "If we are not daily repenting of our sin where we need to, our faith will wither and our walk with God will disappear."⁹¹

Wells then addresses how the holy-love of God impacts our worship. In this chapter he describes the worship wars that are going on across the country. Many of the

⁸⁷ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 130.

⁸⁸ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 147.

⁸⁹ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 156.

⁹⁰ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 175.

⁹¹ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 186.

disagreements are merely about the specific *forms* of worship. Wells presents a more subtle war going on over the actual *content* of our worship. While all evangelicals claim the content of our worship is God and his greatness, at issue is whether our worship is being needs-driven or God-centered.⁹² In response to this, it would seem it need not be strictly either-or, but can address both. As we seek to meet real felt needs, as Christ did, we can see hearts open up to the deeper needs of forgiveness and reconciliation.

For many in our therapeutic culture, worship has become a blend of inspiration and entertainment with a loss of the transcendence and greatness of God. The fellowship we share is much more than about our feelings for one another, than by the faith that we hold in common.⁹³ In contrast, we are one in Christ because we have the same Savior, the same faith, and worship the same Triune God. “The more churches become like their own culture, the less reason there is to be in a church.”⁹⁴ It is both the immanence *and* the transcendence of God that feeds our hungry souls. We worship God because he first reached out to us. We worship God because of the sensed presence of God that comes when we delight in his holy-love. Without the holy-love of God as central to our worship, we would be “adrift in so many of our churches on a sea of triviality, amusement, and superficiality.”⁹⁵

Wells concludes the book with a practical challenge to serving one another. In place of a psychology of the autonomous self we find ourselves falling under new management: the Lordship of Christ. The effect of God’s holy-love in our lives leads us to want to express love to others. At its heart, this love is “self-abnegating and self-

⁹² Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 190.

⁹³ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 196.

⁹⁴ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 199.

⁹⁵ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 216.

giving. It is intent on promoting the good of others. It does not keep tally of what it gives up or what anyone owes it.”⁹⁶ This love is what motivates and impels us to serve others. The holy nature of God is what impels us to want to fight the injustices of the world as well. In a world celebrating its self-focused, self-preoccupied, self-seeking ethos, we find ourselves at the threshold of a great opportunity. “Though he holds all things together, though he is the very center of reality, though he is the very measure of all that is true and right, and though he sovereignly rules over all of life, he nevertheless stoops and makes himself known through others.”⁹⁷ Authentic Christian service reveals the consuming holy-love of God for a lost people. It is this holy-love that saves, that sanctifies, that empowers worship, and that animates worship to disclose our loving redeemer to the world.

As this book seeks to present a response to his previous five, one can get the sense that all his books seem to say the same thing. Technology is viewed with a jaundiced eye, culture has poisoned the church, and the modern forces of pluralism have weakened our moral fabric. James K.A. Smith writes, “I find myself asking: Isn’t this the same book again?”⁹⁸ He claims that Wells presents a false dichotomy between the Scripture and culture and states that our goal is not a biblical viewpoint bereft of culture, but a cultural formation that’s biblically infused. Smith also claims a false dichotomy between the objective versus the subjective, citing Augustine’s meditations on the soul. In response to this we certainly see quite a bit of overlap between all of Wells’ books, but each

⁹⁶ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 238.

⁹⁷ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 241.

⁹⁸ James K.A. Smith, “Stop Blaming ‘The Culture’ for Our Distorted View of God.” *Christianity Today*. November 22, 2013, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/december/david-wells-god-whirlwind-stop-blaming-culture-for-our-dist.html>.

emphasizes a different aspect of how the fallen condition of culture has in fact infected the church. I do not think Wells emphasizes the objective completely exclusive of the subjective, but is correcting the order of priority: It is the objective reality of Christ's holiness that should first inform and shape our subjective experience of his love. It is in the truths of this holiness and his love that ultimately gives us meaning and hope for the future. As a helpful balance with a more positive approach, I will next briefly review a few of the writings of Os Guinness that I believe are a helpful supplement to our understanding of these issues.

Time For Truth

In this short book by Os Guinness' the author, like Wells, confronts the modern idea that rejects the idea of objective or absolute truth. He agrees with Wells about today's view of truth being not only relative but socially constructed and nothing more. The result is that any claim to be true or false, right or wrong is patently absurd.⁹⁹ The loss of ethical truth has also resulted in the loss of personal character. In this world of appearances, character loses its significance, and "face value" becomes all important.¹⁰⁰ Today's new postmodern mood has ushered in a new open mindedness in which everything is permitted, nothing is forbidden, and nothing is then unthinkable. Without objective truth the autonomous self bows to no one and seeks to be the sole definer of life and truth. We must become people of truth to be people of freedom. There I no other way to live free. We next take a brief look at Guinness' hope-giving book.

Renaissance

⁹⁹ Os Guinness, *Time For Truth – Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype & Spin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 32.

¹⁰⁰ Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 44.

In this book Guinness contends for a renewal of hope of the influence of Christianity to bring about societal redemption and renewal. The central tenet is that the gospel must be authentically lived out in practice to have influence in the world. Guinness describes the factors of globalization, and the importance that the Christian church must recover its own integrity and effectiveness to demonstrate our faith. He speaks of the need for Christians to be humble and open to the scrutiny of credibility and plausibility.¹⁰¹ It is in our honesty that “we become an incarnation of the truth of the gospel and an expression of the character and shape of its truth. It is in this living-in-truth that proves culturally powerful.”¹⁰²

Perhaps the greatest encouragement from Guinness’ work is his affirmation of the sovereignty of God. He cites the dynamic tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s significance as a both-and reality that can never be separated. What matters most is not where we fit within populist culture, but our faithfulness to God who is forever sovereign. “We have our trust in him to be true to, our tasks to perform and our callings to which we must prove faithful. As always, faithfulness is all, and the circumstances are beside the point.”¹⁰³ God is greater than all, and may be trusted in all situations and concludes with an inspiring challenge, “The time has come to trust God, move out, sharing and demonstrating the good news, following his call and living out our calling in every area of our lives, and then leave the outcome to him.”¹⁰⁴ Our final review of Guinness is about the importance of persuasion.

Fool’s Talk

¹⁰¹ Os Guinness, *Renaissance - The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 59.

¹⁰² Guinness, *Renaissance*, 75.

¹⁰³ Guinness, *Renaissance*, 144.

¹⁰⁴ Guinness, *Renaissance*, 148.

This latest volume by Guinness is referred to as his magnum opus; a rediscovery of the art of Christian persuasion that requires both the rational and the imaginative. In our post-Christian context this book encourages us as Christ's spokesmen to combine the proclamation of the gospel with a boldness to persuade. Like Wells, Guinness exposes the folly of putting our trust in technique over truth. The truth is that most people are not open, not interested and not needy, and many are more hostile in today's pluralistic society.¹⁰⁵ He affirms that we must appeal not only to the mind, but to the heart and passions. In our pursuit to impress God's truth to unbelievers, we must remember the fact that sin is the claim to the right to myself and is the ultimate source of human relativity. It is also the deliberate repudiation of God and the truth of his way of seeing things.¹⁰⁶

A powerful tool that Guinness encourages is that of humor. Guinness presents the idea of the fool-maker, who is prepared to be seen as the fool to "prick the balloons of the high and mighty, and telling the emperor that he has no clothes."¹⁰⁷ He goes on to state that "humor points to faith, in that both humor and faith spring up in response to the reality of the paradox and the incongruities at the heart of human experience."¹⁰⁸ This serves as a refreshing method of communication in contrast to Wells' mostly serious tone.

Guinness describes the anatomy of unbelief as a deliberate abusive suppression of the truth that ends in its own self-deception. "We should never view unbelief as flatly theoretical, loftily neutral or merely as a worldview that people just happen to have... Deep down, the unbelieving heart is active willful, deliberate, egotistic, devious,

¹⁰⁵ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk – Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

¹⁰⁶ Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 74.

scheming and unrelenting in its open refusal, its deliberate rebellion and its total resistance to God and the full truth of his reality.”¹⁰⁹

Guinness states that apologetics and evangelism should always go together and not be separated. The “foolishness” of our message is how “the God of all power chose to become weak to subvert our puny power, and the God of all wealth chose to become poor to subvert our meager wealth, and the God of all wisdom chose to become foolish to subvert our imagined wisdom.”¹¹⁰

In our pursuit to re-capture biblical orthodoxy, the centrality of God in Christ, and the removal of self from the throne, our greatest message is not what we are against, but what we are *for*. Christ, in all his glory, power, love and mercy, this “holy-love” God is the only answer we can offer to a confused postmodern world. In the following chapter of this project I will seek to develop a homiletic system that address the issues raised from this study – truth “that will preach.”

¹⁰⁹ Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 93.

¹¹⁰ Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 175.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A WELLSIAN HOMILETIC

The famous statesmen Winston Churchill is credited with saying, “If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time - a tremendous whack.”¹ It is my intention to hit my point clearly, purposefully and persistently. The purpose of this Thesis Project has one central focus: To develop a homiletic system which addresses sociological and theological implications based on the writings of David F. Wells. This homiletical model demonstrates the critical need and relevance of biblical truth in a world which has “No Place for Truth.” I hope to present a preaching model that will help pastors preach truth to people in a culture that rejects truth.

The problem as argued by Wells is that the evangelical church has succumbed to an ongoing cultural bombardment that has resulted in a loss of a robust theology and the emergence of a faith that is individualistic, self-focused, and consumer oriented.² This research project has labeled this multi-faceted condition as the “iFaith” syndrome. The question this thesis addresses is, “What kind of *preaching* should a pastor employ to counter the pressures of today’s ‘iFaith’ syndrome?” Since the initial writing of Wells’ first book on this subject in 1993, the conditions he has described have “only intensified.”³ My proposed “Wellsian Homiletic” incorporates the synthesis of Wells’ writing into four major themes. Those themes include: 1) The Marginalization of God; 2)

¹ Winston Churchill. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc, 2016, accessed December 12, 2016, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/winstonchu111314.html>.

² David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 11.

³ David F. Wells, *First Personal Interview* by Michael Allen. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA. December 5, 2016.

The Autonomous Self; 3) The Loss of Truth, and 4) The Need for Christ-Centered Preaching.

My project design consists of six components. First I conducted a preliminary interview with Dr. Wells to assure my accurate understanding of his writings. Second, I developed a homiletic model which includes a synthesis of the homiletic systems first developed by Robinson, Pelton, and Chapell. I have chosen these models because I believe they provide a sound foundation for biblically solid expository preaching. Building upon the groundwork of accurate exegesis I wish to employ an application to bridge the gap between the preaching text and our modern world as described by Wells. My proposed model adds an application element to address these modern cultural influences. I refer to this homiletic template as a “WellsHOM,” following the terminology of Randal Pelton. Third, this project includes a preliminary qualitative survey of a focus group of individuals in my congregation. Fourth, this survey was followed by the preaching of a seven-part sermon series implementing this homiletic model. Fifth, this sermon series was followed by a follow-up analytic survey of the same focus group to evaluate the effectiveness of this system in a local church setting. Sixth, I conducted a follow-up interview with Wells for his review and feed-back of my model and any suggestions he may provide to increase its effectiveness in the future.

The goal of this project is to provide a resource that can aid pastors in having a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural influences of our modern times, and to provide a preaching tool that can be implemented to help them preach truth in today’s ever-changing complex society. Our greatest hope is not in a system, but in the authority

of the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, for the glory of God. My prayer is that my fellow pastors will be encouraged and grow in their effectiveness to “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).

Issues to be Addressed in a Wellsian Homiletic

The following is a brief summary of the major issues addressed by Wells and a proposal of how *preaching* can address these “iFaith” issues in a way that is doctrinally sound and culturally relevant. This proposed preaching model is based upon the conviction that expositional preaching is the most-effective means of presenting the Word of God to our congregations. It is my belief that the faithful exposition of the Bible, using proper exegesis of our biblical text, will help assure the most accurate transmission of God’s Word to an audience. His Word is our authority; our authority does not rest in man’s opinions. For the sake of this project, I will use Robinson’s definition of expository preaching as follows:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.⁴

Expositional preaching of God’s Word must accurately present the doctrinal and theological revelation of God within a Scripture text as well as connect that revelation to our modern times. In the words of John Stott, we are most faithful and effective when we bridge the two worlds, that of the Bible, and that of our contemporary audience. “A true

⁴ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 5.

sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both.”⁵

Robinson’s homiletic is the foundation upon which I will build with the emphasis upon the “Big Idea” in a specific portion of Scripture being preached.⁶ Proper exegesis will seek the central and singular idea in a portion of Scripture. I have chosen Robinson because his work is considered a contemporary classic in the field of expository preaching. From this starting point I next include the exegetical tools employed by Randal Pelton, whom I believe provides a more developed structure for greater accuracy of the text within the greater context of the Bible. I expound upon this system with Pelton’s employment of the Contextual Big Idea (ConBI) within its immediate passages, the Canonical Bib Idea (CanBI).⁷ This clarifies how a text fits within its immediate context, as well as how it fits into the overall Scriptural redemptive plan of God. I next employ Chapell’s understanding of Christ-centered preaching. An important aspect of this exegesis is finding out early and presenting the *need* being addressed in the Scripture.⁸ This need coincides with Chapell’s “FCF” (Fallen Condition Focus) which seeks to find “the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.”⁹ The connection will be made later in my Wells HOM below to see how a Christ-centered approach can be employed to recognize Christ and our need for His grace in the passage. This big-picture redemptive view involves the biblical theological view of the larger

⁵ John Stott, *The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 11..

⁷ Randall Pelton, *Preaching With Greater Accuracy: Finding Christ-centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching; Chapter Two* (Electronic pre-published manuscript provided by Randall Pelton at GCTS D.Min. residency June 2016), 9.

⁸ Pelton, *Preaching With Greater Accuracy; Chapter Seven*, 6.

⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 42.

redemptive plan of God in Christ as presented by Vos, which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.¹⁰ This does not mean the artificial insertion of Christ into an Old Testament narrative, but demonstrates how that narrative fits within the over-all redemptive plan of God. This also does not mean we deny all positive and negative examples in the Bible, only that we recognize that we are to follow those examples by Christ's strength and grace.

Once this exegetical foundation is established, I next employ the use of my "Wellsian" homiletical tools. These tools form the distinctive model which aims to address the four key theological concepts brought out by Wells' analysis of the cultural drift in today's churches. In brief summary, the model or template looks like this:

Table 1. Steps to a Wellsian Homiletic

- Step 1 - Robinson's "Big Idea"
 - Step 2 - Pelton's ConBI, CanBI
 - Step 3 - Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus
 - Step 4 - Wells' application to modern culture.
 - 4.a – Marginalization of God
 - 4.b – Autonomous Self
 - 4.c – Loss of Truth
 - 4.d – Christ-Centered Focus
-

The following is a brief overview of the four Wellsian concepts this homiletic model seeks to address.

1. Addressing the Marginalization of God – God is the creator, sustainer, and center of all existence; He is preeminent. God defines reality, and gives purpose to life,

¹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1975), 5.

which guards against what Wells calls the weightlessness and marginalization of God.¹¹

This step seeks to address the question, “How do we see God’s work in history and in the Scriptures that highlight God’s greatness and prevent him from becoming marginalized?”

2. Addressing the Autonomous Self – Culture’s tendency is to focus upon the autonomous self. The Christian life is about the *surrender* of self to Christ for salvation and continued surrender until the consummation of Christ’s return. As Chapell describes the “Fallen Condition Focus,” we need to see what fallen condition is addressed in the text; issues with which we also struggle. A question to address this may be, “Are there examples of the consequences of self-on-the throne?” This self-focus is only one manifestation of our fallen condition, which may also include pride, lust, greed, etc. Another question to include is, “How do we see our dignity as a creation of God when in right relationship with our Creator?”

3. Addressing the Loss of Truth – With the marginalization of God, and the ascendancy of the autonomous self, the idea of objective moral truth has been lost in our culture. This portion of the homiletic model seeks to address and counter that trend and to find examples in the text where moral truth is either ignored or affirmed. It seeks to expose the weakness of a life without moral truth. We can and should employ all rhetorical tools at our disposal to properly communicate in a winsome way, but these tools must all serve the *content* and truth of our faith that drive us to Christ as our Truth. A key question might be, “How does this text demonstrate the goodness and value that God’s truth is universal and unchanging?”

¹¹ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland; The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 88.

4. Maintaining a Christ-Centered Focus – Our sermons should highlight how we stand in awe before God in his perfection and blazing holiness and love, subject to His commands. Our holy God is also a loving God who uses adversity to build our sanctification of character and godliness (Rom 5:3-5). We need to remind our listeners that God wants us to experience transformation, not mere Disney-like entertainment. He wants to make us holy much more than he wants to make us simply comfortable. A key question to ask might be, “How do we see the wonder and majesty of Christ and how He alone is the source of our sufficiency?” This Christ-focus must always lead to our own *inabilities* and our desperate need for Christ and His cross. This approach should reflect either Christ’s sufficiency, or our insufficient human nature that requires the ministry of Christ.¹² We cannot manufacture life-change or grow the church by technology, business models, or proper advertising. God can certainly use the tools of our modern technological world, but we must always recognize it is His Spirit that draws and regenerates, not our cleverness.

This chapter develops a homiletic model to address the issues raised from these preceding four points. Robinson, Pelton, and Chapell form our initial exegetical foundation and the WellsHOM points bridge this exegesis to our modern world. To confirm the accuracy of my main four points extracted from the writings of Wells, I now present and reflect on my first interview with Wells.

First Interview with Dr. Wells¹³

The first component of this project was the interview with David Wells. I found my interview with Wells to be extremely fruitful in helping me to clarify his attempts to

¹² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 277.

¹³ See “Appendix 1: Transcript of David Wells Interview #1.”

understand the forces that are at work in our modernized world that have contributed to today's highly individualized, self-oriented, consumer-driven way of thinking. Wells cites the technological and cultural influences which include the staggering growth of urbanization, communication, travel, multiculturalism, consumer capitalism, cultural relativism, and the information glut that confronts us on a daily basis. Wells clarified that he is not opposed to technology, but has sought to explain the unconscious habits we adopt with the frequent daily use of *certain* technologies. He states that he is indebted to the earlier works of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* and Neil Postman's *Technolopoly*.

To illustrate the psychological shadows that influence our thinking, Wells uses the analogy of a consumer going to purchase a vehicle. The consumer makes numerous calculations. What dealer do we use? How much do we wish to spend? Do we buy American or foreign? What features do we desire? These and other questions demonstrate how we think as consumers in the calculations of daily decision making without being aware of the calculation processes. So it is with our faith, in that we can make consumer oriented decisions in church about whether our needs are being met without even thinking of ourselves as consumers. These influences do not approach us in linear fashion, but confront us all at once and continually, creating an increasingly complicated world in which to live.

In answer to the question about his analysis being too stringent, he firmly states, "Absolutely not. This isn't a sort of nice little academic subject. We're talking about reality here. No, if anything, I would like to add more to what I've said."¹⁴ In answer to the question about how things have changed since his initial writings, Wells noted that he

¹⁴ Wells, *First Interview*, December 4, 2016.

doesn't see anything in the culture that has *essentially* changed, except that influences he has chronicled have "only intensified."¹⁵ Wells affirmed that I am on target in understanding the four major issues that churches need to address from the pulpit. He suggested that we first start with the Marginalization of God. Then, he recommended that we address the Autonomous Self, the Loss of Truth, and the need for a Christ-Centered approach.

In terms of a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of Wells' analysis, following my interview with him, I found myself quite won over and even more in agreement with his description of the true causes and conditions of the weakening of faith in the church. I see the need for pastors to continue to nurture and teach an *awareness* and *sensitivity* to our culture and its erosive influences upon us, as well as the importance of maintaining the tension between the Word and the world. When we no longer see a conflict between the world and God's kingdom cultural drift can occur and our theological and doctrinal framework may be lost. Our focus should certainly not be negatively-oriented, but should emphasize first the light of the gospel and the good news that Christ provides for our needs that can never be met by this world. As we become aware of the world's inability to "fix things" then we may be drawn to the true answer that only Christ can provide.

A Proposed "Wellsian" Homiletic (WellsHOM)

The second component of this project was the development of a "Wellsian" homiletic model. The model that I am proposing will address the four issues noted above. While not every issue is addressed in every text, one or more of these may be addressed in a specific text of a preaching portion. The first portion of the homiletic is to set the

¹⁵ Wells, *First Interview*, December 4, 2016.

foundation with the Robinson, Pelton, Chapell tools. After first looking for the subject and complement to formulate the textual “Big Idea” (TexBI),¹⁶ we then look at how the text fits with its immediate context and as part of its book or epistle (The ConBI). Then we develop the canonical big idea (CanBI) to see how it fits within the over-all structure of the Bible with an awareness of its place within the historical redemptive plan of God in the Scriptures. From here we look to see our shared Fallen Condition focus and how Christ answers the problem cited in the text (Chapell). The Christ-centered aspect will be further developed as the final step of my WellsHOM. An example of this can be found in the text of John 8:31-38. Here the Big Idea is that we, like Jesus’ listeners, think we are free when in fact we are born to sin and are trapped as slaves to sin and can only be set free by knowing Jesus, who is the truth. The Contextual Big Idea (ConBI) is that while the religiously observant Jewish nation assumed their genealogy and religious observances warranted them favor with God, Jesus exposes them as slaves to sin, and invited them to find freedom in knowing Him. The Canonical big Idea (CanBI) is that all humanity is born as slaves to our sin nature and can only be set free by our trust in Jesus the one who saves us and sets us free. The Fallen Condition Focus would be our own tendency to think we are free when we run our own lives and can trust in ourselves. We are unaware that we are enslaved to our own sin nature. The Christ-centered answer is that once we become aware of our inability to live godly lives, then we can trust Christ to transform us by his saving grace. This first component may be summarized as follows:

¹⁶ I am indebted to Randy Pelton’s system gleaned from his book *Preaching With Greater Accuracy: Finding Christ-centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), which I received in pre-published format. His lectures in my first residency of my D. Min. program at Gordon-Conwell have further enhanced my grasp of these big idea concepts. I find his structure and abbreviations helpful in understanding the major structural components that help to ensure the accurate preaching of God’s Word.

Table 2. Homiletic Steps in Sermon Exegesis

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1. Develop “Big Idea” (identify subject and complement).
 2. Identify the Contextual Big Idea (ConBi).
 3. Identify the Canonical Big Idea (CanBI).
 4. Identify the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF).
-

From this structure we now add the Wellsian elements. While others have written on the effects of culture on religion (Berger, Guinness, Taylor, Ellul, etc.). I believe Wells provides an accurate over-arching understanding that is helpful to evangelicals to help us avoid cultural drift into the “iFaith” syndrome. This model identifies the four major cultural influences that may affect us as believers and asks of the text which of these are being addressed in a text of Scripture. Not all issues would be addressed in every preaching passage, but we need to consistently ask the questions of these steps to stay alert to our tendency of our cultural drift. These points serve as ongoing boundaries to keep us aware of the world’s deceptions where we may drift off-course. We now turn to the development of our four WellsHOM steps.

1. WellsHOM1: Marginalization of God – For the sake of the template or sermon outline, this may be thought of as WellsHOM1. This step identifies ways that God is marginalized or moved to the margins of irrelevance. Any number of questions may be asked to shine the light on God’s centrality. These questions include “How is God glorified or marginalized in our lives? What do we learn about the nature and the greatness of God in this passage? Can we see how his sovereignty rules in history, through people and circumstances? What can we learn about his Holiness? How is his justice emphasized? What do we see of his mercy and love? What of God’s beauty is expressed? How might the genre of the text help communicate something of his character? In short, what is so great about God from this passage, and how does our

modern context minimize or ignore that greatness?” After spending time on how great God is we then need to contrast how our cultural context mitigates against that understanding. In what ways is God shrunken to merely a personal preference rather than one who reigns over our public actions? An example of this can be seen in Isaiah 46:8-13. God calls Israel to remember and stand firm, remembering he is God and there is no other. God claims his “counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.” He is not a crutch for the weak, but Sovereign of all creation. From here we move to WellsHOM2.

2. WellsHOM2: Autonomous Self – This step identifies the tendency to focus upon the self, independent of God. This next section follows the logical progression that addresses the specific fallen condition focus (FCF of Chapell) that we share with the original recipients of this text regarding our own self orientation. While many other fallen condition focuses can be found in a text, this seeks to ask the questions that face our culture regularly. “Isn’t it all about me? How do we wrongly position self as the center of life and how can we rightly position Christ back in the center of life? In what ways do we miss the greater picture of life by our self-orientation?” We include an affirmation of the biblical nature of man in his dignity as made in God’s image. An example of this may be found in our Isaiah 46:10 where God declares that “my counsel shall stand.” This confronts our own prideful ideal that we write our own script and follow our counsel without the need of God. The self is exposed for its own inadequacy. In this step, the use of humor and self-disclosure may be excellent tools which can help to disarm the natural defensiveness with which our fleshly pride may react. A pastor who connects his own failings with the text gains the trust of the audience that he is authentic and not simply

preaching down to an audience. Of course wisdom should be observed to avoid too much self-disclosure that would make others uncomfortable. The difference between a “God-centered” and a “man-centered” sermon is its purpose: Is it primarily to glorify God and demonstrate his majesty, or is it more focused upon glorifying us and meeting our needs? From here in our sermon structure we connect the next logical step of this progression, the WellsHOM3.

3. WellsHOM3: Loss of Truth – This step looks for ways that truth is ignored or denied. This is where we ask of the text, “How do we tend to relativize truth and stretch it to mean what we want? Why make such a big deal about objective truth? Isn’t it enough to be sincere about your feelings or beliefs? Why is relativism so dangerous?” If God is marginalized and the self is exalted, it is only natural that the idea of truth becomes dismantled. With the loss of truth, ethics and morals become a matter of personal taste. Thus the marginalization of God results in the loss of moral absolutes. This may provide us the opportunity to talk about the nature of truth itself, and how we cannot function in society without certain assumed absolutes, whether they consist of engineering calculations of a bridge, or the meaning of words in a contract. An example of this can be found in the text in Isaiah 46:13. In this text God says he will “Bring near my righteousness.” We are not conjuring up an idea of righteousness, justice, or truth, but we *discover* a justice and truth which comes from God. And his truth is not an irrelevant or detached theory; it is a truth that he “brings near” to our lives. In connecting our need for agreed-upon social standards, such as math or currency, we can help our audience see the logical possibility that there is a Creator God who has defined absolutes and whose holiness requires justice. Appealing to the need for societal justice helps connect the text

to daily living. Here the pastor can expose the disconnect of a world without truth with the truth demands of an absolute God, and that God's truth makes logical sense to have a world of order rather than chaos. This truth is not merely about physics or chemistry, but is rooted in the morality of God's very character. This leads us to WellsHOM4.

4. WellsHOM4: Christ-Centered Focus – This step utilizes the employment of Pelton's and Chapell's focus to bring us to our need for Christ. Ultimately the aim of our preaching should be to demonstrate our *inability* to correct the problems in our lives, leading us to see our *need* for the gospel. The questions it asks include, "How do we fix our broken world? How can we stop sinful habits? If God calls us to be holy, how in the world can we accomplish such an impossible task?" We must be honest with our listeners in helping them discover that a self-help approach will never meet the greater needs they have. From our text in Isaiah 46:8-13, we can find that God's charge to remember and stand firm are ultimately outside of our human ability to maintain. Only by relying on Christ's grace and strength can we find His strength to stand firm. The sermon should shy away from a moral exemplar approach that only urges us to "try harder and do better." A human-oriented therapeutic approach will prove to be inadequate. We are faithful to the gospel when we help our hearers recognize that we *cannot* try harder or do better in such a way that will be pleasing to God. Our inability to please God brings us to the reality of our need for grace, for the gift that only Christ can give. More than feeling better about ourselves, or obtaining helpful hints to improve our life experiences, we need to emphasize how Christ is the redeemer. It is His story which runs all throughout Scripture as God's redemptive plan from the very beginning. We should ask of our presentation of the text, "What are called to do or become that is impossible without the intervention of

Christ and his grace?” The historic death and resurrection of Jesus makes redemption possible for us to experience God and his love in a very real way. The beauty of the gospel is that what we cannot do, Christ can do by his Spirit working in us.

I recognize that as we employ this homiletic model, we may not answer every question in every sermon; nonetheless every sermon will address at least in some part the reality of God’s goodness in light of the world’s counterfeit.

This model must include the effective use of other communication skills as well. The wise use of the rhetorical skills of a strong logos message, with a sincere authenticating ethos, including a passionate and heart-felt pathos are powerful tools for clear communication.¹⁷ Using the communications tools of rhetoric helps us preachers in doing our best to rightly handle God’s Word not only in exegetical understanding but in homiletical effectiveness to the recipients. Sermon length is a detail that will vary with every culture and setting, and the wise pastor will know when to stand up, when to speak up, and when to shut up. As the old saying goes, “The mind can only take as much as the seat can endure.” The homiletical skills of varying tempo, and emphasis, and intensity with humor are what make preaching such a challenging science *and* art form. While this model or template that I am proposing will not guarantee life change, I hope it may be a helpful tool to keep our listeners aware of the tension between God’s truth and the world’s culture. This model may serve as our ongoing reminder “tool” that we are called to be a people of the Word, and that by definition puts us at odds with the modernized cultural influences of a world that is still just as broken as it has always been since the

¹⁷ The lectures of Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs in my D.Min. Residency at Gordon-Conwell have been a significant well-spring of learning that have taught me more than I realized I didn’t even know. My growing understanding of the classic communication tools of rhetoric have opened up new ways of communicating that have helped broaden me to think more as a homiletician and not just as a preacher who has relied mostly on personal study and instinct.

fall. From here we will examine how this proposed homiletic works out in practice, with the testing of the system.

Initial Survey

The third component of this project implemented an initial survey of my congregation prior to my sermon series. To test the helpfulness and effectiveness of this homiletic model I conducted a preliminary qualitative survey with a focus group of parishioners from my church to test the usefulness of this model at my local setting.¹⁸ I then preached a seven-part sermon series entitled “God Truth in an iFaith World.” The purpose of the initial qualitative survey was to determine my congregation’s understanding of the importance of doctrine and theology. The first ten questions were quantitative questions on a 1-5 scale that covered topics such as the idea of objective truth, relative morality, the veracity of Scripture, and the nature of humanity and God. My decision for the use of these ten specific questions was influenced by the survey conducted by the Barna group regarding a biblical worldview. I found these questions helpful in quantifying the building blocks to a biblical worldview.¹⁹ The next five questions included: “What do you believe is the purpose of the church universal? What is the purpose of the Sunday morning worship service? What do you feel is the purpose of preaching in a worship service? What do you believe are the core essentials to biblical Christianity? What do you think it means to be a disciple of Christ?” I wish to use these qualitative questions to test my homiletic system regarding the four-step WellsHOM. The first ten questions helped identify how strongly my congregation holds to a biblical

¹⁸ See “Appendix 3: Survey #1.”

¹⁹ George Barna, “Most Adults Feel Accepted by God, but Lack a Biblical Worldview,” *Barna Group*, August 9, 2005, accessed December 20, 2016, www.barna.com/research/most-adults-feel-accepted-by-god-but-lack-a-biblical-worldview.

worldview. The second five qualitative questions were to measure their understanding of what biblical thinking looks like and how it is expressed in the church in today's culture.

Of the 27 recipients of the survey, I received 14 responses. While this is a small sample group, these individuals represent a strong cross-section of my most faithful members. My goal was to identify my congregants' beliefs about the Bible and theology, and then to apply my teachings to see if their beliefs changed measurably.

Sermon Series

The fourth component of this project included the development and preaching of a sermon on the subject of "God-Truth in an iFaith World." My goal was to define God's truth and to define an "iFaith" way of thinking that describes the modern self-oriented, therapeutic consumeristic worldview of our times.²⁰ Part one of the sermon series addressed the cultural drift that is occurring in churches and how we are called to be transformed and not conformed to the world. Part two of the series addressed the idea of the loss of truth and how dangerous such a relativistic way of thinking may be. It brought to light the consequences of denying truth, and the need to recover God's truth as an absolute that is not only helpful but necessary. Part three of the series addressed the marginalization of God, and how consumerism shrinks God into a commodity to meet our needs. It emphasized the sovereignty and holiness of God as one to whom we are all accountable. Part four of the series addressed the autonomous self, and emphasized the fallen nature of man to focus on self, and the need for redemption in Christ to re-direct our focus on Christ as Lord and our moral responsibility to Him. Part five of the series addressed what it means to be a new creation and the need for regeneration by God's Spirit as the only way to reform our lives to be what we were created to be. This included

²⁰ See "Appendix 4: iFaith Sermons" for complete sermon outlines.

an emphasis on the need for grace that is given freely and which we could never deserve. Part six of the series addressed the concept of life together and the importance of living in genuine community with other believers in a congregation. It emphasized the idea of encouragement and living to serve others rather than self. The series concluded with Part 7 which was entitled, “The Way Out” and provided the hope and answer of the holy-love of a God who is absolutely perfect, and yet is full of love which was demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Christ, and our need to live in an awe and mercy in an intimate relationship with the Lord. While I realize this sermon series only serves as an overview or introductory survey of the issues discussed, each of these topics may become an entire series in itself.

Table 3. Seven-Part Sermon Series Outline

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1. Cultural Drift in an iFaith World
 2. Loss of Truth in an iFaith World
 3. Marginalization of God in an iFaith World
 4. The Autonomous Self in an iFaith World
 5. New Creations in an iFaith World
 6. Life Together in an iFaith World
 7. The Way Out of an iFaith World
-

The goal of the sermon series was to speak directly to the cultural influences of our world and how they are at odds with the Word of God and the nature of God as demonstrated in Christ. The point was not to shake our fists at the darkness, but to focus on the light of God’s love, God’s sovereign power, and God’s amazing grace offered in Christ. The series emphasized the essential nature of all of us needing to be reminded that it is by God’s grace that we are saved, and we are called to God’s holiness, and we live by God’s Spirit, and that everything exists ultimately for God’s glory. The series aimed to

be God-focused, not man-focused. We should stress God's truth and virtue over our personal relativistic values. We should confront the consumer religion of our day and turn the focus back to God as king and us as his children. I implemented my Wellsian homiletic in developing each of these sermons. Following the preaching of this series I then conducted the post-survey.

Follow-Up Survey

The fifth component of this project consisted of a follow-up survey after the sermon series. This second survey contained the same ten quantitative questions as the first survey on the 1-5 scale and five analytic qualitative questions.²¹ While not every subject in these questions was emphasized in the sermon, I included each question to determine if any movement occurred in these worldview questions. The next five questions covered the specific major subjects addressed in the sermon series, which included the following:

Table 4. Follow-U Survey Questions

11. In what ways do you believe the church has succumbed to “cultural drift” (becoming more conformed to the world)?
12. Has your understanding of the purpose of the church, corporate worship, preaching or the core essentials of biblical Christianity changed or grown? If so, how?
13. In thinking about the Loss of Truth, why is it important for the church to re-capture the conviction of God's absolute truth?
14. In thinking about the Marginalization of God, why is it important for us to re-locate God back to the center of importance in life?
15. In thinking about the Autonomous Self, how should the church combat this trend of consumeristic self-oriented religion?

The results of the survey of the focus group indicated that our people, or at least our most committed members, initially already have a strong biblical worldview. In

²¹ See “Appendix 5: Survey #2.”

Survey #1, we found that in questions 1-4, 8, and 9 scored a cumulative average of 4.67, indicating a strong view of the Bible, truth, God and Christ. Questions 4-7 and 10 have an average of 1.29, indicating a strong rejection of unbiblical ideas. The final five questions indicated a biblical understanding of the purpose of the church, preaching, discipleship, and doctrine.²²

The results of the second follow-up survey indicated very little movement within the first ten quantitative questions.²³ Regarding the final quantitative questions, it appears the group gained a stronger understanding or awareness of cultural drift that is seeping into churches. Most people's understanding of the purpose of the church is unchanged, as most already had as fairly strong understanding of the church's task to preach the Word and proclaim the gospel for salvation. The understanding of the importance of moral truth and God's centrality stayed strong. Regarding consumerism there was a sense that we need to be reminded that it's not all about us.

In that the respondents of this focus group consisted of our faithful church attendees, I am not surprised that there was little movement or new knowledge attained through this sermon series. The sermon series appears to have been a reminder that our life is not about ourselves, but mainly about God, and the series enabled a greater ability to discuss or articulate these issues. Clearly this small sample size of one small congregation is not conclusive, but suggests that believers may be made aware of the importance of being vigilant to stay alert and to not compromise to our "iFaith" culture. I will reflect more upon my findings of this survey in chapter five. This leads to my second interview of Dr. Wells to obtain his analysis of my homiletical system.

²² See Appendix 6; Qualitative Survey #1 Results.

²³ See Appendix 7: Qualitative Survey #2 Results.

Second Interview with Dr. Wells²⁴

The sixth and final component of this project consisted of a follow-up interview with Dr. Wells. In my follow-up interview with Wells, he noted that most writing on preaching deals primarily with technique, and that my attempt to engage culture in preaching on a theological and doctrinal basis is very difficult, but critically important. While we have commentaries which may be very helpful in our exegesis, there are no commentaries on addressing the cultural pressures of our modern world. His feedback about my project affirmed that he believes I am right on track and stated that I “have absolute clarity on what you are driving toward. And that is easier said than done, believe me.”²⁵

His main suggestion was for me to consider becoming familiar with H. Richard Niebuhr’s book *Christ in Culture* as the definitive work that has given the Church the language to talk about how to engage our culture. In his book, Niebuhr provides five models or ways the church has engaged the culture historically. Dr. Wells suggested that three of those models could be helpful for our context. One of the three models is “Christ Against Culture” which serves to identify the ways culture is hostile to Christian truth. A second model is “Christ in Paradox to Culture” which demonstrates the incompatibility of culture and God apart from the redemption through Christ on the cross. Niebuhr’s third model is “Christ Transforming Culture” which seeks ways for Christians to have an influence in changing the culture around us, especially in the arts, music, literature, etc. He suggested that I seek a way to integrate these three models into my four-part homiletic

²⁴ See “Appendix 8: David Wells Interview #2.”

²⁵ David Wells, *Second Personal Interview* by Michael Allen. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA. January 9, 2017.

of the Marginalization of God, the Autonomous Self, the Loss of Truth, and a Christ-Centered focus. Wells noted that the goal is not to address every model in every sermon, but to determine ways in which Neibuhr's three elements might be used in the application of the four steps in my proposed Wellsian homiletic.

Wells noted that I may already be incorporating these three models into my expository sermons without even knowing it, and I agree with that statement. He affirmed my understanding that Christ in Paradox is very much in line with the work of Tim Keller (*Preaching*) and Bryan Chapell (*Christ-Centered Preaching*) in preaching, and that seems to already fit into my fourth homiletic instrument of being Christ-centered. Wells observed that a lot of evangelical preaching mostly addresses the idea of "How to do your Christian life."²⁶ While this doesn't apply to all preachers, it is certainly a prevalent trend he has witnessed. His concern about the preaching model of Christ Transforming Culture is that we may overstate our ability to make a major change in culture at large, and it should be tempered with challenging our people to make a more modest approach to make a difference in their individual circles of friends or associates.

He concluded the interview by recognizing that there are so many different viewpoints, so many paradigms, and so many methodologies that seem to go on endlessly, but that I have found clarity with my approach. He indicated concerns that the small size of my study group may not yield significant conclusions, and I agree, but I recognize that this first focus group was only a first run at a course of study that I plan on pursuing for years to come.

²⁶ Wells, *Second Interview*, January 9, 2017.

Conclusion of the Project

Having explained my six-part design in this project, I have sought to develop a homiletic model that can be employed that can regularly address the major cultural influences that confront the church in our modern age. My first step was Wells' initial interview helped to confirm my understanding of his analysis. My second step included the homiletic model I developed which began with the first half consisting of providing the sound exegesis utilizing the tools from Robinson, Pelton, and Chapell. The second part of this component addressed the four major cultural issues of the Marginalization of God, the Autonomous Self, the Loss of Truth, and the Christ-Centered priority. Following this system development my third step consisted of a survey of a focus group of my congregation to obtain a baseline of our church's theological understandings. The fourth step employed a seven part sermon series addressing the topics and using my model. The fifth step surveyed my congregants after the sermon series to test its effectiveness. The sixth step involved a follow-up interview with Wells.

The following final chapter will review the implications of my follow-up survey, my interview with Wells, and where we may go from here.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ONGOING PROCLAMATION OF TRUTH

This thesis-project has attempted to provide a clear understanding of the complexities of some of the most pressing of today's modern cultural influences and how a pastor might respond from the pulpit. Chapter one identified my specific ministry setting is that of the resort community of Cape Cod, which serves as a microcosm of today's self-oriented therapeutic consumer culture, referred to in this thesis-project as the "iFaith" syndrome. This "iFaith" syndrome has infected the lives of believers, resulting in the weakening of doctrinal understandings of truth. To be more specific, today's cultural pressures have resulted in the marginalization of God, the rise of the autonomous self, and the over-all loss of an understanding of objective truth. The primary source material from which I have gleaned my analysis is from the sociological and theological reflections of David F. Wells. The main question this thesis-project has sought to answer is, "What kind of preaching should a pastor employ to counter the cultural drift towards the *iFaith* condition?" The thesis of this project proposes that pastors can counter this cultural *iFaith* drift by employing a homiletic which incorporates the sociological and theological analysis of the writings of David Wells: a "Wellsian homiletic" that demonstrates the critical need and relevance of biblical truth as the antidote to a world where there is "No Place for Truth."

Project Review

Chapter one of this thesis-project introduced my ministry setting, problem, research question and thesis. Chapter two of this thesis-project included the biblical and theological framework from which a Wellsian homiletic may be developed. Chapter three

provided a literary review and critical interaction with the writings of Wells. Chapter four outlined the six-step project, which included a preliminary interview with Wells, development of a Wellsian homiletic, a pre-survey, and a seven-part sermon series on “God Truth in an iFaith world.” This was followed by a post-preaching series survey and a final interview with Wells. In this fifth and final chapter I would like to address the lessons learned from this project, reflections on my surveys and interviews with Wells, implications for preaching, and future considerations.

Lessons Learned

In reflecting upon the specific focus of this project, it has become clear to me that the erosive effects of our modern culture are even more potent than I had perceived since embarking upon this journey. The statistics among evangelicals across our country are continuing an upward trend in terms of biblical illiteracy, moral relativism, and cultural adaptation. I am also impressed by the increasing complexity of the effects of the world’s culture upon the church. The ways in which we interact with information, the media, technology, and our increasingly inter-connected multicultural world are changing the ways we think and make decisions. With ever-expanding choices among products, ideologies and religions, we are losing our ability to maintain a coherent and consistent worldview. The gravitational pull of consumerism is a constant pressure that appears to continue to increase unabated. We are bombarded with a flood of information, confusing our thinking about everything from what we believe about homosexuality to what brand of cat food to buy. This resultant self-orientation has shifted our thinking about faith and virtues from a theocentric understanding of biblical morality to a therapeutic view of how our personal needs may be met. The “Googlization” of our daily lives has provided an

almost unlimited array of information available instantly on our cell phones. The problem is that we have lost our ability to discern and discriminate between important truths and irrelevant trivia. This flattening of values and the democratization of knowledge thanks to Google and Wikipedia have nurtured the aberrant idea that all information is equally accessible, equally valid and to be interpreted on the same self-focused plane of preference and opinion. Studies from Barna,, Gallup, Pew Foundation and others have indicated that the loss of the transcendent has seeped into many churches as believers are finding it harder and harder to discern truth from error and to navigate our complicated ever-changing world. This underscores my conviction that now, more than ever, churches need pastors who will unashamedly preach God's Word with a robust biblical and theological content to counter these pressures. Pastors need to help our people to stay aware of these cultural forces, and to think biblically and discern the tension and incongruities between the world and God's Word.

This does not mean, however, that all preaching should be negative and merely point out the errors of the world and curse the darkness. The primary focus of our message should be Christ and His glory, His grace, and His provision as the *positive* answer to the soul-cry of our hearts. As we continually turn to Christ and the gospel we find His wisdom and strength that help us see the world's temptations more clearly, and to see unbelievers with greater compassion, realizing we all face the same temptations. As the church we are much more about being *for* Christ, than we are *against* everything and everyone. This project is less about decrying the wrongs of the world, and more about continually turning to the light of God's holiness and recognizing mankind's

universal need for His healing grace and forgiveness. From here, we turn to reflect upon the survey results of this project.

Survey Reflections

As previously noted, the survey results of the focus group from my own church demonstrates little change in terms of understanding of the need for God's truth in our relativistic world. Having pastored this flock for nearly two decades, they have listened for years to my sermons about the need for a biblical worldview and how to become aware of truth versus error. What has come up in multiple discussions at church and at Bible studies is that our people are more *aware* of the tendency to drift. The survey results indicate an appreciation of my church for a God focus rather than a man-focus. I do not believe that most believers wake up one morning and decide to drift into heresy or moral relativism. Our congregants have stated their appreciation of the ongoing reminders of staying vigilant to avoid conformity to the world. They are recognizing the importance of consistent biblical truth coming from the pulpit with God's Word as our authority. They recognize that the idea of being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2) is a constant ongoing process. Some of the survey results indicate people's recognition that if we "go with the flow" it will always be downhill and away from God. This sermon series has served as a booster shot to help inoculate our people against the infectious nature of the world's value system. It appears that these regular reminders may be helpful to other churches to also maintain a focus on God's truth. With that in mind, I now turn to reflect upon the feedback from my Wells interviews.

Wells Interview Reflections

An impression I developed from each interaction with Wells is that after years of my own personal reading, study, and reflection on this issue, when I meet with Wells I feel like I have been wading in the shallows and just jumped into the deep end. Instead of coming home with answers, I tend to come home with more to read, more to study, and more to reflect on. As noted in the previous chapter I received a strong confirmation that I am on target with my understanding of the effects of our modern culture upon the world and believers, and have articulated a solid list in the four Wellsian homiletic points. In my first interview Wells encouraged me to read more of the sources which influenced him: Ellul, Berger, Postman, and Lasch. In my second interview Wells encouraged me to read Niebuhr's *Christ in Culture* and seek to integrate these models into my homiletic. Having since read these works, I am even more impressed with Wells' clarity in encapsulating these content-heavy works into an understandable analysis for the everyday pastor. Technique, automation, urbanization, and the communication explosion are covered extensively in these works, and these writings have deepened my convictions that believers need regular teaching of God's truth to counter the thinking of our modern culture. While Niebuhr provides the language to describe the four ways the church has interacted with culture, the bulk of this thesis-project is to emphasize how Christ is *against* culture. By this, I mean that a major pressure for doctrinal drift among believers is to conform to the ways of thinking of today's modern culture. From this understanding we now move to the implications to our preaching.

Implications for Preaching

The first question I wrestled with in this entire project was, “Why should I pose yet another homiletic model?” What else could be added to such homiletic experts as Robinson, Pelton, and Chapell? Having been impressed by the writings of Wells and having those observations confirmed by multiple sources including Barna, Pew, and Gallup, I have been burdened to address these issues in preaching. Having received such excellent exegetical and homiletical foundational structures, I have attempted to provide a homiletic model for expository preaching to address these cultural pressures we all face. In thinking of Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, perhaps this thesis-project is my attempt at answering the question of “why?” to provide a homiletic model that articulates the answer that Christ provides in an iFaith world. I realize others have written about how to contextualize our preaching and how to challenge believers to godly living. My hope is that this project could provide a model or template of cultural engagement to be incorporated into a preacher’s “toolbox” that could be regularly employed throughout a preaching year. The biblical preaching commended in this project is a part of the disciple-making process to mature believers in Christ.²⁷

Perhaps a second implication would be an encouragement for preachers to continue to grow personally in their own understanding of culture’s effect upon us and how to counter those pressures. All of us pastors could use regular reminders of the cultural conflicts we face in a broken world. While pastors’ lives are full of so many plates to keep spinning, it is important to our own ministerial integrity that we keep first things first. Our focus upon preaching God’s truth and how it engages a truth-adverse

²⁷ Scott Gibson, *Preaching with a Plan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

world must remain a priority. What many preachers may do by instinct may be sharpened to greater effectiveness as they become aware of how insidious this iFaith culture is to modern believers' faith by reading and learning about these trends.

In my own ministry I have sensed a heightened importance to present biblical truth and contrast it to our shared temptations to conform to the world. I have grown in my understanding of the importance of maintaining my own awareness of the effects of modernity in my own life, and seek to share those struggles and answers with my fellow pilgrims. The appropriate use of humor and self-deprecating stories allow the congregation to laugh with me at how easily we can slip into the "all about me" condition. We can see how easily we leave God out of the equation in our decision making, allowing Him to become marginalized. While the loss of the idea of absolute moral truth is not a personal struggle for me, I feel it is important to continue to remind my congregation, as I remind myself, that God's truth is what stands, regardless of my preferences. It is the transcendent God to which we are all held accountable. Perhaps the most significant impact of this project on my own preaching is the template that I insert in every sermon that addresses the four Wellsian homiletical points (Marginalization of God; Autonomous Self; Loss of Truth; Christ-Centered approach).

Perhaps a third implication is that pastors could take this model and apply it as a way to regularly remind their own congregations to focus on God's centrality, the insufficiency of self to run our lives, the reality of a truth to believe in, and the wonderful message of the gospel to keep us aware of Christ's all-sufficient grace. I desire to help motivate pastors to proactively confront modern culture's erosive effects upon faith and not to underestimate these issues. I hope to see pastors pursue inclusion of a robust

theological content in their sermons that doesn't merely respond to felt needs. I hope to see a resurgence of focus upon a God-focused, Christ-following obsession from our church's pulpits.

Where Do We Go from Here?

I recognize that this thesis-project serves only as a beginning point to wrestle with what it means to live in today's modern, technological, communication-saturated culture. In short, I have attempted to provide a homiletic model that pastors may employ to help our people live *in* the world, but not be *of* the world. Having reflected throughout this process I wonder if the issue of consumerism should receive more attention. I recognize that consumer thinking is the natural result of a world that rejects God, promotes the self, and rejects truth. In our technological and affluent culture, today's capitalism affects many of our decisions whether we are aware of it or not. Because of this, we should maintain a vigilance with a clear awareness of our own consumer tendencies. In my work in the coming years, I can see where I may amend my four-part WellsHOM where I will move the Christ-Centered focus earlier into the exegesis portion of my sermon development and add a new WellsHOM4 that would be "Consumerism." While it may not appear in every sermon, consumerism is an ongoing struggle that Scripture may correct. This preaching project serves as a foundational part of my larger goal of providing an ongoing discipleship process of empowering believers to know and follow Christ, and make Him known throughout our lives.

Another step I will consider is the writing a regular blog or church website post that addresses how to connect God's truth to one of the issues of our modern culture. I may call this "Truth Connection: Connecting God's Truth to Our World." I would like to

address specific examples manifested from my four-part analysis of culture and truth. These articles would include examples of how we see Scripture engaging and refuting our cultural influences. For example, the story of Balaam in Numbers 22 shows us how Balaam succumbs to the temptations of consumerism and personal profit. I hope to seek opportunities to share the various aspects of this homiletic with my pastors' network on the Cape, giving specific examples of application.

I also plan to become a member of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and plan to attend the annual conferences and keep reading and growing in my understanding of applying my study of culture to my sermon development. I will also consider future writing opportunities to address this issue. I recognize that this project is incomplete and warrants more reading, reflection, prayer, and interaction to help believers to be salt and light in the world. It is ultimately for God's glory that I hope this project may be a positive contribution.

Conclusion

Perhaps Dickens had it right for our time: "These are the best of times, these are the worst of times." Perhaps a part of that "worst" is that we have unprecedented pressure to self-oriented relativism, with a therapeutic consumerism saturating the air we breathe. And perhaps the "best" of these times is that we live in a culture that has become disenchanted with Enlightenment's promises, and may be primed to consider a transcendent answer of a God of truth and love. With the world's cultures now in every city, we have the opportunity to engage lives as missionaries without ever leaving our own country. Perhaps these are days that present unprecedented challenged and unprecedented opportunities. We have this opportunity to preach in a way that emboldens

believers to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). My hope is that we would preach from the conviction that there is a place for truth. There is a place for virtue and truth. There is a place where God is central and Christ is essential. It is to my fellow pastors that I commend these words of encouragement and hopeful assistance. The promise inspired so long ago comes ringing through the ages to here and now: “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NASB).

APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPT OF DAVID WELLS INTERVIEW #1

Dec 5, 2016, 10am – Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Dr. Wells' Office

Let me try to put these books in a sort of context for you. Now, the time I began, Charles Taylor had not written his massive book 'A Secular Age'. I don't know if you've seen it; it's pretty massive. Charles Taylor's question really was my question, although, as I said his book hadn't come out. Right out front of the book, probably about page 5 or 8, right up front, he gives his question that he's gonna write on; what he's trying to solve. Then, he doesn't solve it immediately. 500 pages elapse before, in which he gives a sort of explanation of what lies behind the question, so that the reader knows what the question is. It's page 500x the question recurs again, and then he picks it up. Okay, here's the question. 500 years ago, thinking of Europe, and of course next year's 500th of Reformation. 500 years ago it was almost impossible not to believe in God, the supernatural, moral absolutes, religious authority, and that authority located in the church. It was almost impossible not to believe those things.

Today, it's almost impossible to believe any of those things. So, what has happened to us? Why are the cultural winds blowing so strongly in our face on all of those subjects? Well, the answer is that through modernization a public environment is created. And, we are typically no more aware of it than a fish is that is swimming. A fish never, I'm sure, thinks about what's going through its gills, and in much the same way, we don't think about this culture, this public environment that makes it very, very difficult to live in our minds within a theological frame, and to sustain the truths in that theological frame. So, that was the question that I began with. How has this come about? What is this public environment like?

Having said that, let me ask you a question, something you've said twice in your summary; once early and once later. You say that I'm opposed to technology. Why do you say that? [My answer, I've read that criticism, and it seems he shows how technology has been an influencer with negative influence. Perhaps I've misunderstood that.]

"You have, and this is really a very important point, which is why I'm raising it here. If I were opposed to technology I wouldn't have those electric lights on, or the computer, and I wouldn't have driven up in a car. I would have found an Amish community. No, the point here is something quite different. You have a little reflection in here about technology that we shouldn't throw stones at it, but rather we should teach people the wise use of it. But it wasn't technology that I was thinking about, but rather the unconscious habits that go with the frequent constant daily use of certain technologies. This wasn't an original thought of mine. I think I've cited and I certainly was indebted to Jacques Ellul and his books 'The Technological Society' and Postman's 'Technopoly.'" (Sure).

It's looking at the sort of psychological shadows that the processes of modernization create. That's what I'm trying to figure out in those books. It's not what some people have said as in technology; I'm not opposed to technology. If you think about our capitalism, I'm not opposed to capitalism. I work in Africa. The only hope for Africa is that they get some capitalism going, some investment, because they're getting further and further behind, and their people are just wretchedly poor. So, I'm not opposed

to capitalism at all, but think about what happens when we go through the normal rhythms of life; we're not thinking about it.

We go down to the mall we buy, all the time we're making these internal, sort of assessments; calculations. You've got a million different products. How do you choose one? How do you choose a car? You got all these dealers all around. So, you go through this process of making a judgment, you try to start with how much money you've got to spend, should you borrow, maybe you have to take a loan? Then you think about how bit a loan I can carry? Then you look at all the different models. Do you want to buy an American made car, since the UAW has taken all of the quality out of them? No, I'm not going to consider an American car, I'm going to go Korean or Japanese, Okay, so I'm going to go Japanese. but then you've got choices there too. So you go through all of these calculations and we're just unconscious of doing them. Just like breathing, you're not conscious of breathing unless you can't.

What happens when people come into church and their habits are those of a consumer, of "I identify my needs and I make a judgment as to whether you, Mr. Preacher man, are meeting my needs. And if not, there are other auto dealers all over the place, I can just go there. This is what my books were trying to identify, because if we don't see that then we may be totally biblical in the sense that we believe the bible, we're reading the bible, but it will all come to rest upon something that is essentially destructive to that biblical truth, and we won't even know it. So, I'm trying to get, in these books, I'm trying to get to the psychological backdrop even presuppositions that go with a modernized culture. Now this, what I'm talking about, I think is the sort of pre-eminent question of our time. I've gotten a couple of things for you here... (articles: Todd Johnson World Christian Encyclopedia quoted by NY Times, Wall Street, any facts/figures; "protestantism after 500 years" just done it – shows in the part of the world that is modernized; [Europe, Canada, us, Australia, new Zealand... Koreans read my books like crazy because I was writing about America but they're seeing in their own country because of modernization]).

What has happened is that Christian faith is disappearing from modernized regions of the world. Now, the US is the exception, but all of the others, Europe, Britain (separate since Brexit); Canada, Aus. New Zeal, church attendance at any kind of church is in the 3-6% range on any given Sunday. But it didn't use to be that way, and this article shows the decline in Europe and the rise of Christian faith in the global South specifically in Africa.

What we're talking about here, this isn't just an academic subject; this is a life and death thing. Your last question which I'm taking up now, do I think that I've been too negative about culture in what I've said? Well, here's something to consider, and I just happen right now to be working on an essay, about 1/3 through maybe, and I picked up this point, so you'll see it, and you'll see a little bit of the literature related to it. For about 40 years there has been a vigorous debate as to what the fate of religion is in a modernized society. It's still going on, and you have TWO competing views on this. And the reason they continue to go back and forth in my view is that they are both partly right. So they both have a leg to stand on.

One the one hand you have those who say, and almost all Europeans say this; there are those who say that modernizing societies create irreversible hostility to all religion. And to that is usually added the conclusion that therefore it is just a matter of time before all religion is eliminated – that modernization is the cause for the “dragging of the gods into retirement” – someone put it. And there’s something to be said for that argument, for the Christian faith has virtually vanished in Europe, Canada, Australia, new Zealand.

But the other side to this argument, and these are principally Americans, who are saying, “Wait a minute.” As Peter Berger put it earlier in the 70s when he changed his mind on this, he said the world is as furiously religious as it’s ever been. In fact, in 1999 he wrote a book called “The secularization of the World; Resurgent religion and world politics. And he is arguing that religions not only can but they are flourishing in modernized contexts. So that’s where the debate is. It’s still going on. Steve Bruce in Scotland just four years ago published his latest book on this. Now, the one before that was entitled “God is dead in the west.” This one is called “Secularization in defense of an unfashionable theory.” He is arguing that secularization will kill of all religion. It’s becoming unfashionable because of people like Peter Berger who have been pushing back on the other side. How long have we had the Enlightenment with its secular humanism, how with humanism. How long is it gonna take to eliminate all religion? And they’ve had a couple centuries to do it. So I think both sides have a point, and the only reason I raise it is this:

Is my analysis too stringent? I say “Absolutely Not.” When you see the enormity of what’s happened. This isn’t a sort of nice little academic subject. We’re talking about reality here. No, if anything, I would like to add more to what I’ve said.

Well, this thing “Losing our Religion: the impact of secularization on the understanding of sin” this is just the front of a little essay I’ve written, and it has some of the stuff I’ve just given you. And while I’m at it, I’ve copied two essays; don’t know if you read The Journal of Homiletical Society; there are two essays in which I have reflected on preaching. It’s entitled the Theology of Preaching: the biblical word in the contemporary world.” So those I’m going to give you all of those.

Now, let me ask you a further question. Now this is just in terms of the form that you’re following here. Has Dr. Arthurs seen this, and he’s okay with it? [Yes, I’ve got some editing to do]. What I was just thinking about your project and it occurred to me that what you have done here is just summarize each book. So there actually stuff in here that is not pertinent to your project. Now you won’t love me for what I’m about to suggest. You’ve got four subjects at the end that you think come out of this which are pertinent to your project: 1) The Loss of truth (by the way, did you know that the Oxford Dictionary this year declared a new word and declared it to be the word of the year. The word is “post-truth”. And Post-Truth is the circumstance under which objective facts are less important and in fact do not control internal perception. This year. Post-Truth. You’re current, Man. So your first point the loss of truth. The 2nd truth the Marginalization of God, the 3rd point Autonomous Self, 4th point Christ-centered focus. What I wonder, why not take those points rather than giving a general summary of each book; take those points and work them through the books, develop what I have written on those points and actually (so more of a thematic approach), and you can consider this. I

know you're not going to love me. What you could do is under those points just to look at the books that I cite so that you yourself are getting into the literature. What I've done in those books; it's a way of thinking that is not typical, and it wasn't for me when I started. I mean, this is the Sociology of Knowledge; a technical. So, I had to teach myself how to think differently about the culture, and just for your benefit and for the project I'm just wondering if it wouldn't be helpful to read at least some of the books that are germane.

I'm thinking for example Ellul's *Technological Society*, Postman's *Technopolity 2*, the *Autonomous self* by Christopher Lasch; these are the defining volumes, and I think were you to do that I think you would really begin to understand how this whole thing is sort of put together. And you need to know that because if you don't how are you going to say anything on preaching that is germane to that culture?

[What would be the books that you would most recommend, what are most important? Ellul? Postman? Others top 5 of 10?]

There are a lot of books in the bibliography which I've read but didn't necessarily cite. The books that I cite typically are the books you should consider. You may not be able to consider them all, but at least some of them. Os Guinness, he and I were theological students together, and what we say is "just like that" (2 fingers together) although he writes on subjects I don't write on, and there's a reason incidentally. He did his dissertation on Peter Berger, and the first thing I did for my project was to get Guinness' 600 page dissertation and I needed to get Berger's framework in place before I read further, so that's what I did. So Guinness and I really think alike, so unless it's on a different subject where I haven't written he won't probably have anything that's too different from what I've written. But the books that I've cited, those books would give you a real handle on it. And it needn't – don't think you actually have to be that current in that sort of literature because the way it's set up, you are using what I have written as a statement of the nature of the culture, so it makes perfect sense to use the books that I used, so for your project that makes perfect sense.

[I want to grow, be biblical be relevant. Your books have been most helpful, and I see the trendiness the disconnection from history, the fragmentation; and what I'm seeing now is the inability to think over a period of time; we live experientially; unconsciousness of fish swimming in the water; the water is our culture. .. I want to be the voice that makes people aware; (the emperor has no clothes; here's the clothes; here's the king the Word of God – to think biblically. Believers don't think due to effects eroding our foundation. What will stop us from becoming Europe; I believe it starts in the pulpit; in hearts of pastors; want to be something to contribute to help preachers get our preaching right; people are consumers and don't even realize it. People consumers and aren't even aware of it...]

The difficulty you have is that you are a pastor and pastors never have enough time for everything that needs to get done in a church from personal crises to preparing a sermon to make sure the church doesn't head off into a ditch. Pastor's lives, I've been one myself, it's just very, very difficult for you to do a project like this it really is. What you really need to do is to take off a year, which you probably can't. Your church wouldn't allow it. In fact my church here, First Congregational, this time last year our Sr. pastor who's been with us about 20 years was given 7 weeks off to go to Scotland. And I said to

myself I just don't see how this is going to work. Well it turned out in this instance I was dead wrong and it worked out just great, but we've got a lot of internal preachers. Typically churches just don't want to do that, certainly not for a year, perhaps for a month but not for a year and that is a problem.

Incidentally the reason in the front of "No Place for Truth" the reason I did that little thing on Wenham I was trying to think how you could illustrate to a person what this abstraction of modernity; what is it about? I was trying to think about how to communicate this, because most people have not the faintest ideas what modernization or modernity are. It just came to me, and I could have taken any town, and Wenham was there and had a little museum, and I had done quite a bit of work on 19th century American religion so it just worked out fine, and was very easy to do. And so, what I've done on that chapter is to describe how the town changed as a result of these innovations like the train comes, telegraph, telephones, then to television. So my question therefore is "What happens to Christian faith at the end of this development of modernization?" That's what my whole project has been about.

[Why would you say American was unique in modernization and not like Europe?]

Isn't that the 64 million dollar question (pause). I think that the reason is that we are still substantially rural. Isn't that interesting. Look at the map of this last election; you're not an American, you come from some other part of the world and I show you this map, and I show you most of it is all red, you would think there isn't a single democrat; it's all red. But you have these little coastal bands, these are the highly urbanized areas, and in those areas, Christian faith is closest to being extinct, but the south and the Midwest, that great central region there you still have a lots of Christian faith. That's the only thing that I can think of. Europe by contrast has relatively little rural areas. It's urbanized. The thing about cities, big cities, and they typically are big and getting bigger all the time, the thing about cities it they bring people into very close proximity with one another in a context of anonymity. You have no idea who you've just walked by or who the person is on the other side of the counter. It's cities, these great hubs of legal and financial information and businesses, and they are essential to the capitalism that keeps us all alive, gives us jobs. But in these cities where you have this concentration of people, you have people of every religion and of no religion. Every kind of spirituality, every different life style, worldview. The almost inevitable consequence of this is a relativism. And, the Christian faith becomes deeply privatized. Because, when you're in that sort of context, the only way you can get on with each other is by being sort of generic. And people get very offended if you spout Christian talk, especially at them. Everybody gives everybody space mostly. So, what happens is that Christian faith lives inside, Period. Because the outside is sort of hostile. And what is this, if not secularization?

[What changes have you observed since the initial research and writing of No place for truth?]

Well, changes in culture, changes in Christian faith. I don't see anything in the culture that has *essentially* changed, except that what I was describing has only intensified. Now, it's true of course that technology has been absolutely brilliantly innovative in the last 20 odd years. Sometimes, dangerously so. I think of the hacking of

Pedesta's, and then it goes on WikiLeaks. That was just unbelievable, and it comes tonight that this wretched newspaper we have here in Boston, the Boston Globe, of the NY Times were colluding with the Clinton Campaign. Tell us what articles you want us to write and when to publish them? Really? But, all of this was exposed by really brilliant technology. So, there have been changes like that, but I don't think that anything has essentially changed in terms of the nature of this modernized culture. It's just become more intense.

[What about the evangelical church?]

Well, we all hate people who say, "I told you so," but unfortunately I think I have been proved right. I wish it weren't true. I think there is right now, I think there is a sort of shake-down happening in the evangelical world. It's silent. Eerdman's asked me for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to write a sequel to "The Courage to be Protestant" and I thought about it. It's very nice when a publisher comes to you. I thought about it, and I thought, "I don't know what a sequel would look like." So I came back with a counter proposal. Let me just re-write it, and as I do, I will tie it back into the Reformation. So, that's what I've done. But when I looked at that book, it's not that old, but already there is stuff in there that I just stripped out. Specifically, the emergent have vanished. And the Seeker-sensitives are collapsing. And what I think I see coming already is a kind of re-constituting of a more serious, a more doctrinal and a more reformational kind of evangelicalism. The people represented by The Gospel Coalition; I think this is probably much bigger than people realize, but it's sort of quiet. Nobody's saying a lot about it or boasting or critiquing it. It's sort of under the radar, but I think this is an important change which is happening.

[In looking at the Four buckets or responses or needs to address; loss of truth, marginalities, self, Christ-centered... Am I on target with these as major issues that our culture has lost?]

"Absolutely." I would think about the order in which you did it. The Marginalization of God is really what secularization is about. ..you're really not going to love me. If I were in your shoes, I would try to, up front first thing, relatively briefly, try to do something not exactly like my chapter on Wenham, but give a description, in fact you could even... Charles Taylor's question.. "Why is it that 500 years ago people believed, found it almost impossible not to believe in the existence of God, the supernatural, religious authority, moral absolutes, that authority localized in the church. Today it's almost impossible for people to believe any of these things. This is what you're really doing. You're trying to understand what these counter-veiling forces, these winds that are blowing in every body's face; you're trying to understand what those are. The Marginalization of God is right up front; it starts right there. And that is connected to the autonomous self. Once God is marginalized and the self is autonomous from everything; the past God himself, even facts.. once you have that then truth is gone. (as a logical consequence?) Yea.

[Is there anything else that you would say to me that would be helpful in the limitations of this project?]

I've already said too much. Ha ha.

[Rubber meets the road: What advice would you give to preachers that would ensure strong and robust theology and doctrine to always be present in preaching?]

My view of preaching is the same view I have of the nature of theology. The only difference in my opinion is the audience. When you're doing systematic theology, your audience in the nature of the case is a specialized one. How many people take one of these theology books off the shelf and read it? Most people can't even understand it. So, you have a very tiny audience for technical theology. For preaching you obviously have a much wider audience. But what you're doing when you preach, in my opinion, is no different from what you do when you do when you're doing theology.

So, I describe it in terms of a triangle, whether you're doing theology or preaching, you've got to get around this triangle. It begins with what I call "Confession" (top of triangle), and that is in theology what the Bible says on any subject. The person of Christ. When you're preaching, it is your text or passage, and how that text or passage relates to other texts or passages. It's confession. Then coming down on one side of the triangle down to the bottom I have Reflection. That is, as preacher you have to think about that truth or passage or text. I mention in one of those articles on preaching P.T. Forsyth's remark of who preaches to the preachers. The answer is that the Bible is the preacher's preacher. The preacher has to hear that passage *himself* first. And *think* about it. Now, in theology you're thinking about a lot of things including the history (person of Christ) the creeds, all of this contemporary thought on the person of Christ when you're doing theology. When you're preaching you obviously don't take in all of that. You're thinking about a text, and you have to see its connections to other texts and set up the whole fabric in your mind. Once you've done your exegesis. And then finally you come along the bottom to the third corner, you have Application. You have to connect all of that, make it intersect with life. That's what your project is about.

To answer your question specifically, most preachers who have lost any doctrinal framework have lost it because there is no tension in their minds between the Bible and culture. Faith lives along that line of tension. Faith is never more active than when you have a text or truth in your mind and it is being contradicted or denied or brushed aside through the culture. Now this is uncomfortable to live in this tension and so typically what people do is to cut it. So, in a sense they are biblical in that their minds have texts or truths in their minds, but those have no connection to life around them. So they still nourish that person in a way, but not with the vibrancy and the pointedness that they should.

[Would you say the cutting of that cultural tension is the frog in the Kettle syndrome?]

"Yes." [There is no difference there is no conflict...] "Yes." [I don't want to be just a negative guy; there is great hope in Christ, but there is absolutely no hope in this world. I don't want to be a negative preacher.]

"But you're not negative."... [I don't want to be the one only yelling at the darkness, I want to point at the light]

You start at the light, I would never start at the darkness. I never have ever stood up and said, let me tell about what's really bad about this culture. No, No, No. You start

with a text, and you develop its great truths, such that they instruct and lift up the soul or warn biblically. Whatever the text is. But along the way, and you don't have to do it every single Sunday, every single sermon. But along the way, what you also have to do is to help people understand their context; where they're living, and what it does to them. [Help them think critically?] Yes. It's a long-term project. And you don't have to deliver everything you know on technology or consumerism in one sermon, but you just peg away at it, so that people begin to, in a way, develop a little sensitivity about it so that they, "Yea yea, that's right."

[What are your thoughts on my project in general?]

Well, the total project is exactly what preaching is supposed to be about. In a way, John Stott instinctively wanted to do this. Now, I lived with John Stott; I came to faith through him through University Mission. He was a dear friend for many years. ... The Title of his book... Between Two worlds; that's what you're doing. Now in John's case, and he actually said this himself; he did not understand the culture; he really didn't. In fact, at the rectory in London where John lived we had a New Zealander who came and lived there a while and was quite brash, and he really was very direct with John who is a wonderful expositor; just a magnificent expositor. But once when they were marching out of the church he said to John, "So What?" So John, who was just a wonderfully humble godly man said, you know you're right. But the problem was that Ted Schroeder (that was his name) he didn't know how to understand the culture. So he dragged John off to see some movies. It's okay, movies are a part of our modern world, too. Sometimes reflect it; oftentimes reflect it. But you have to know what to look for in the movies to. So I don't think John ever quite was able to make that transition from one world, the world of biblical truth into the other. So this is what you're trying to do, and I think it's exactly what needs to be done.

[Thank you for your time and insights...]

APPENDIX 2: REFLECTIONS OF WELLS INTERVIEW #1

I found my interview with Dr. Wells to be extremely fruitful in helping me to clarify his attempts to understand the forces that are at work in our modernized world that have contributed to today's highly individualized, self-oriented, consumer-driven way of thinking. At the heart of his quest in his multi-book project was a desire to address the same question that Charles Taylor addresses in his book *The Secular Age*, which came out after Wells' books. That question looks at the changes that have occurred in the past 500 years where it was previously almost impossible for a person to *not* believe in God, the supernatural, moral absolutes, religious authority, and that authority located within the church. In today's secular age, Wells stated that in the developed countries of the West (Europe, U.K., Australia, New Zealand), excluding America, it is almost impossible to find people who *do* believe these things. The question is, "How did this occur? Why are the cultural winds blowing so strongly in our face on all of those subjects?" Dr. Wells' over-arching answer is that modernization has created a "public environment" of which we are as unaware as a fish in water. It is the various aspects of this public environment that Dr. Wells seeks to address that make it very difficult to live in our minds within a theological frame.

A very helpful point of clarification addressed my assertion that Dr. Wells is opposed to technology. He pointed out that he is not opposed to technology, but was trying to identify "the unconscious habits that go with the frequent, constant daily use of *certain* technologies." Wells cites from Todd Johnson's *World Christian Encyclopedia* that the Christian faith is disappearing from the modernized regions of the world. While the U.S. has been the exception, we are now seeing that same weakening of the faith in America due to the growth of modern cultural influences. These technological and cultural influences include the staggering growth of urbanization, communication, travel, multiculturalism, consumer capitalism, and the information glut that we face on a daily basis. It is these influences about which Wells writes that are affecting the churches in our country. To illustrate the psychological shadows that influence our thinking, Dr. Wells uses the analogy of a consumer going to purchase a vehicle. The consumer makes numerous calculations. What dealer do we use? How much do we wish to spend? Do we buy American or foreign? What features do we desire? These and other questions demonstrate how we think as consumers in the calculations of daily decision making without being aware of the calculation processes. So it is with our faith, in that we can make consumer oriented decisions in church about whether our needs are being met without even thinking of ourselves as consumers. These influences do not confront us in linear fashion, but all at once and continually, creating an ever complicated world in which to live.

Regarding the question about whether Wells has been too negative about culture and too stringent about its effects, his answer is, "Absolutely not." When we see the enormity of what's happened in the world and what is occurring in our country, he states that this is not just a nice little academic subject; this is real life we're talking about. This is a life and death issue. If anything, Wells responded he would like to add more to what he's said. Regarding the question of how he has seen things change since his original writings, he stated that the culture has not *essentially* changed, but that the issues he has described have only *intensified*. A point of hope Wells brings is his observation of a very

quiet “shake-down” happening in the evangelical world with a “re-constituting of a more serious, a more doctrinal and a more reformational kind of evangelicalism” as seen in groups such as the Gospel Coalition. He suspects this movement is larger than people realize and that this positive important change is occurring gives him hope.

In terms of a critique of strengths and weaknesses of Wells’ analysis, following my interview with him, I found myself quite won over and even more in agreement with his description of the true causes and conditions of the weakening of faith in the church. I see the need for pastors to continue to nurture and teach an *awareness* and *sensitivity* to our culture and its erosive influences upon us, and the importance of maintaining the tension between the Word and the world. When we no longer see a conflict between the world and God’s kingdom cultural drift can occur and our theological and doctrinal framework may be lost.

Our focus should certainly not be negatively-oriented, but should emphasize first the light of the gospel and the good news that Christ provides for our needs that can never be met by this world. We do however need to maintain a distinctive awareness of the failings of the counterfeit nature of the world’s message of hope, strength and meaning. It is as we become aware of the world’s inability to “fix things” that we may be drawn to the true answer of Christ.

Perhaps a couple of metaphors may be helpful. As a car’s alignment becomes skewed by hitting potholes in the road, so the Christian’s life can become mis-aligned by the “potholes” that our increasingly complex and technological world present. As we point to the goodness of God’s grace in Christ, only then can we highlight the deficiencies within ourselves and our culture. These deficiencies point to our genuine and real needs that only Christ can redeem; that only his grace may “re-align.” A second metaphor to help our understanding is the use of construction tools. I reckon the writings of Wells as a specific “tool” such as is used in a building project. Much like a hammer that is needed to drive and pull nails, it does not serve well as a saw. A saw is designed to cut wood, and a hammer is designed to connect wood. I see the “tools” of Wells’ writing making pastors *aware* of the cultural influences upon us and our people, and to impress the *need* to continue to present this ongoing awareness to our congregations of those influences, ever-drawing them to the truth. If we ignore the draw of the world, it can and will have a destructive result in the loss of the power of the gospel in people’s lives.

Wells’ advice is for pastors to start with the text of Scripture, reflect and think through the great truths presented in that text, and help our congregations understand those truths in their own contexts and the specific application. Wells noted that we don’t have to address technology or culture with every sermon, but to help our people, along the way, to think critically, viewing this as a *long-term* project. As Wells noted, we would be wise to “just peg away at it, so that people begin to, in a way, develop a little sensitivity to it [our cultural context].” Regarding the weaknesses that I am addressing I must admit that I don’t really view them as weaknesses. Rather, the “tool” of Wells’ writing is to educate and motivate pastors as to the critical importance of being aware of the culture’s influence upon us all, and to pass that understanding and relevance to our congregations in our mission of making disciples of Christ. The specific “tool” that this project hopes to provide is in the application of that information in the form of sermon structure and delivery (a homiletic system). This is the preaching part of the informing aspect of the writings of Wells.

APPENDIX 3: SURVEY #1

Qualitative Survey
“God-Truth in an iFaith Culture” – Part 1 (Before Sermon Series)

On a Scale of 1-5, how would you respond to the following:

(1=Strongly Disagree ... 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. Objective Truth exists that applies to all people for all times. _____
2. Regular devotional Bible reading is important for spiritual growth. _____
3. I think about God and offer up prayers throughout the day (average day). _____
4. I believe it is my responsibility to share my faith in Christ regularly where appropriate. _____
5. I believe there may be other ways to heaven besides faith in Jesus. _____
6. I believe morality is a matter of personal preference. _____
7. I believe the Bible can mean whatever you want it to mean. _____
8. I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is our highest authority. _____
9. I believe in the existence of a conscious eternal hell for those who die apart from Christ. _____
10. I believe in the inherent goodness of humanity and that mankind is improving with each generation. _____

Without consulting outside sources, please respond briefly to the following (your understanding right now, not what you think should be the correct answer. It's okay if you are unsure.)

11. What do you believe is the purpose of the church universal? _____
12. What is the purpose of the Sunday morning worship service? _____
13. What do you feel is the purpose of preaching in a worship service? _____
14. What do you believe are the core essentials to biblical Christianity? _____
15. What do you think it means to be a disciple of Christ? _____

APPENDIX 4: “IFAITH SERMON SERIES”

“God-Truth in an iFaith World”

Fall 2016 Series

- Sep 11 – iFaith Series part 1 “Cultural Drift in an iFaith World” (Rom. 12:1-3).
18 – iFaith – part 2 “Loss of Truth in an iFaith World”
25 – iFaith – part 3 “Marginalization of God in an iFaith World”
Oct 2 – iFaith – part 4 “Autonomous Self in an iFaith World”
9 – Guest Speaker:
16 – iFaith – part 5 “New Creations in an iFaith World”
23 – iFaith – part 6 “Life Together in an iFaith World”
30 – iFaith – part 7 “The Way Out of an iFaith World”
- Sept 11 – Part 1. “Cultural Drift” (Rom 12:1-3 The importance of being alert, aware of culture’s pressure to conform...).
- Conforming power of the world
 - Incompatibility of God w/ the world
 - Staying Alert / awake to the world’s influences (Eph 5:15-16)
- Sept 18 – Part 2. “Loss of Truth” (what is truth?) (John 8:31-38)
- The Danger of Opinions
 - The consequences of denying truth
 - The freedom of Truth
- Sept 25 – Part 3. “Marginalization of God” (Isa 46:8-13)
- Consumerism – God is the product
 - Transcendence & Immanence
 - Sovereignty (God the Potter – Jer. 18)
 - Holiness (Isa 6:1-8)
- Oct 2 – Part 4. “Autonomous Self” (Romans 7:14-8:1)
- I’m a winner, special and deserve... entitlement
 - Who is Lord? – the “need” for control
 - Nature of Man – sin nature Exposed
 - Moral Responsibility – Guilt as a reality, not merely a feeling – showing our NEED
- Oct 9 – Guest Speaker Rob Swanson
- Oct 16 – Part 5. “New Creations” (Titus 3:3-8)
- Holy Spirit regeneration
 - God’s calling and wooing
 - Salvation by Grace through faith
 - Breaking the cycle of sin to live out good works
- Oct 23 – Part 6. “Life Together” (1 Cor 12:12-20 – “the Body of Christ”)
- Part of a great Metanarrative (history is His story)
 - Gifted to be Useful
 - From “I” to “We”
 - Ministry of Encouragement

- “I’m Third” (God first, others second, I’m third.)
- Oct 30 – Part 7. “The Way Out” (Psalm 103:1-14)
- God’s Holy-Love
 - Recapturing Awe
 - Surprised by Intimacy

“Cultural Drift in an iFaith World”
 “God-Truth in an iFaith World” Sermon Series Fall 2016 – 9/11/16

TEXT: Romans 12:1-3

TexBI: Paul urges the Roman believers to reject the world’s influence and be transformed according to God’s will in clear-thinking humility.

ConBI: The mercies of God that provide salvation also empower believers to reflect His kingdom in their own lives through daily surrender to Him.

CanBI: The righteousness that comes by faith in Christ not only saves us from death, but transforms us from being self-lovers to being God-lovers to glorify him to all humanity.

HomBI: “Don’t Drift; Be Transformed!”

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal truth is presented in the text? (We Exist for God)
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? (God’s will is perfect.)
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? We need Transformation, about God, not us (idolatry of Self).
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? Renewal of the Mind (regularly)

Illus: Swimming in ocean... Looks like the land moved with the tide... YOU moved!

Quotes: “In the beginning God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since.” – French philosopher Voltaire (legal name: Francois-Marie Arouet), early 1700’s. - *Notebooks* (c.1735-c.1750). - <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Voltaire>

“Cultural Drift in an iFaith World”
 “God-Truth in an iFaith World” Sermon Series Fall 2016 – 9/11/16

INTRO: [Our World is ever-changing...

What do I mean by “*God-Truth*?”

Barna Stats...

The church is DRIFTING away from its Core Truth, it’s God-Truth...

So, today’s first installation of this series is entitled “Cultural Drift In an iFaith World.”

“Don’t Drift; Be Transformed!”

>> Would you open the Bible to Romans chapter 12, found on page 947.

Background: Just shared about Gentiles being grafted in, Israel's temporary hardening; final redemption of all by God's unsearchable riches, wisdom, mercy and grace... last verses form a Doxology:

TEXT: Romans 12:1-3 (p. 947)

1. (v.1) "appeal" = "parakalōn" (fr. Parakaleo) = call to one's side, summon, invite, appeal, urge, exhort,
2. (v.2) "Do not be conformed" = Imperative passive: strong force: don't be shaped or fashioned according to... like Play Doh in a mold... result of pressure + proximity.
"CULTURAL DRIFT" = The constant pressure to follow the world and become like the culture around us...

- BUT (transition) "be transformed" [μεταμορφοῦσθε Metamorphoosthe] =
- "by renewal of your mind" = anakainosis: renovation of your thinking;
- "that by testing you may discern" = "dokimazo" same word in 2 Cor 13
"examine, test, prove,

"Don't Drift; Be Transformed!"

- Stay Alert / awake to the world's influences -Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV) ¹⁵
Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Q: What's Our Practical Application? We are living sacrifices by our Minds being Transformed (regularly)

3. (v.3) "By grace given to me" = because of God's empowering favor and acceptance of me and upon me, I give this call and charge to EVERY ONE OF YOU:

Q: What Drift is Confronted? The Idolatry of Self.

What do we learn about God's GREATNESS? (God and His will are Perfect)

CONCLUSION: We can live out this life by God's grace, and in His strength when we remember:

- 1) TRUTH: 2) GOD'S GREATNESS: 3) CHALLENGE: 4) PRACTICAL ACTION:

“Loss of Truth in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World” Sermon Series Fall 2016 – Part 2– 9/18/16

TEXT: John 8:31-38 (p. 894)

TexBI: We, like Jesus’ first listeners, are born to sin and are trapped as slaves to sin and deception, and can be set free only by knowing Jesus, the truth, and that freedom is the real deal.

ConBI: While the religiously observant Jews thought their genealogy and religious observances warranted them favor with God, Jesus confronted them as still slaves to sin and deception and invited them to know Him as the truth that would set them free from the slavery of sin, deception and death.

CanBI: We are all born as slaves to the sin nature, enslaved, darkened and confused, and can only be set free by knowing Jesus through faith as our truth, as our savior, our way, our redeemer.

HomBI: “Knowing the Truth will set you Free. The Truth is not a thing, it is a person: Jesus.

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal truth is presented in the text? (Jesus, being God in the flesh, is the embodiment of all Truth, the Ultimate Reality as Source, Creator, and Lord. He is a Truth that can be known. He is the only way to freedom from sin.)
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? (Jesus is Enough - sufficiency of Christ. His grace is greater than our greatest sin, more powerful than our sin nature, vanquishing the devil and the grave by His resurrection.)
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? (We can feel “in control”. We can take pride in our nationality, heritage, and our external performance, but none of it is sufficient. In the end, we are all enslaved and cannot free ourselves. Only in Surrender to Christ alone as our Truth can set us free.)
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? (“ABIDE” Learn to dwell in His presence daily, recognizing your need for Him in every area of your life. Thank Him for his sufficiency, invite His presence throughout your day. Be sure to invite him into “every room” of your house and confess your dirt when he turns on the light.)

“Loss of Truth in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 2: 9/18/16

INTRO: [Last week I introduced our new fall series “God-Truth in an iFaith World” and spoke about the conforming pressure of the world that is affecting the church. I spoke from Romans 12 about how to “CULTURAL DRIFT” and how not be *CONFORMED*, but be *TRANSFORMED* by the renewing of our minds. Today I’d like to talk about the subject of TRUTH... “What is Truth?” ... this is the question of the ages. This is the question asked of Jesus by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at his trial... “What is Truth?” [graphic]...

George Barna's research (May 25, 2016 Article "*The End of Absolutes: America's New Moral Code*") indicates: 80% of Americans are concerned about the nation's moral condition. However, how do we define morality?

...So this brings us to Part Two of the Series, entitled: "Loss of Truth in an iFaith World"

Would you open the bible to John 8:32 as we look at a brief exchange about truth with Jesus and others...

TEXT: John 8:31-38 (P.894

FIVE WORDS, Objection & Solution

1. "Abide" =

2. "Disciples" =

3. "Truth" =

- Embodied in Jesus, the embodiment of God in the flesh:

- John 1:14; 5:33; John 8:44; 14:6; Num 23:19

4. "Know" = Experiential, Relational, not mere cognitive or intellectual (Illus: *Know my wife*)

5. "Free" = (and the truth will set you free)

- ἐλευθερώσει = Meaning: 1) to make free 2) set at liberty: from the dominion of sin, no longer a slave

Objection: (v. 33)

(They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"")

- "offspring of Abraham" = belies the national pride, trusting in their heritage, religious superiority, the EXTERNALS that can be manipulated and controlled...
 - The Problem: Relying on SELF.
 - The Problem: "Relativistic Truth", which is a man-centered and man-defined truth.
 - Today's Highest Value: "Tolerance"
 - "old tolerance" =
 - "new tolerance" =
 - Question: "Why is Relativistic Truth a problem?"
 - The Problem: Confused Separation (Bifurcation)

Solution: (v.34-38) – Today’s postmodern thought claims “there is no solution!”... only the struggle... only the journey... there is no final point, no overarching meaning, no metanarrative.... Only random experiences stuck out in space and time... But Jesus had an answer...

Conclusion:

So, the Five words from Jesus:

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

1. Abide
2. Disciples
3. Truth
4. Know
5. Free

“Marginalization of God in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 3: 9/25/16

Sept 25 – Part 3. “Marginalization of God” (Isa 46:8-13)

- Consumerism – God is the product
- Transcendence & Immanence
- Sovereignty (God the Potter – Jer. 18)
- Holiness (Isa 6:1-8)

TEXT: Isa 46:8-13 (p. 607)

TexBI: God charges Israel to remember his faithfulness in times past, confirming that He alone is God, in charge of all things, including foreign kingdoms and will keep his promises to restore Israel.

ConBI: God points out the powerlessness of the Babylonian idols, and reminds Israel of His faithfulness and that He alone is God and will accomplish all his will in history.

CanBI: God’s providential sovereignty directs history to bring salvation to all believers, whom he chooses to lavish grace, favor, salvation and righteousness.

HomBI: “It’s All About God, We’re merely players in His story.”

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal truth is presented in the text? God is Sovereign
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? He Directs History for his glory, and saves undeserving sinners. He is not only Transcendent over time and space, but is Immanent in being close to those who call on him.
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? Focus on ourselves keeps us short-sighted, not only in scope of our lives, but in the short span of time in history. We are powerless to accomplish lasting change apart from God.
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? Become a habitual “remember-er” of God’s deeds, and God’s promises, and especially God’s Power over All Things.
- 5) How do we see Christ in this text? He saves the undeserving, in His perfect timing, and will return in the Father’s perfect timing.

QUOTES/STATS: “Voltaire: God makes man in his own image; man seeking to return the favor.”

“Marginalization of God in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 3: 9/25/16

INTRO: [Today I bring Part 3 of our sermon series “God-Truth in an iFaith World”.

“In the beginning God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since.”¹

Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet), *Notebooks*, c.1735-c.1750,
<https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Voltaire> (accessed September 8, 2016).

Nietzsche had it wrong. “*God is NOT dead.*” In today’s society He is just *IRRELEVANT*.
How can we become aware of this tendency to marginalize God, and what can we do about it?

I present for your consideration today’s sermon entitled, “Marginalization of God in an iFaith World”

TEXT: Isaiah 46:8-13 (p. 607)

1. (v.8) Call to Attention: “Remember”

“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old...”

Q: “What are we to Remember?” A: All that God has SAID and DONE.

“*Remember*” (Heb. “*zakar*” = to remember, recall, call to mind = forms used 265 times!)
+ “*stand firm*” (Heb. “*hashash*” = take courage, be assured, be established, firm, strong, well-grounded; KJV “shew yourselves men”)

“It’s All About God, We’re merely players in His story.”

- Remember... That brings us to our next lesson:

2. (v.9) God Stands Alone

“for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me”

“It’s All About God, We’re merely players in His story.”

We now turn to our next truth:

3. (v.10-11) God is in Control

“declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ ¹¹
calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

Q: “What does God’s Control mean?”

KEY TRUTH: God is Sovereign (In Control; Ruling, Containing, Animating, Sustaining, etc.)

Also known as “Providence” in previous generations.

Q: “What does this mean?”

1. He Sustains Creation (space, physics, atoms, planets, birds, animals, insects....)
 - Colossians 1:17 (ESV) ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
2. He is in Charge of History (beginning from end; working in our time – intersecting eternity with temporal beings)

3. He Ordains and changes Leaders (Raising up Cyrus of Persia “*bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.*” >> 150 years before He was born! Not until 538BC Cyrus’ decree to send the Jews home)
4. He Allows All Events to Occur (both good and evil) for His ultimate glory
Nothing happens outside of His control, nothing happens without His permission.
4. (v.12-13) God Saves the Undeserving
“Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness:
¹³ I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

“Autonomous Self in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 4: 10/2/16

Oct 2 – Part 4. “Autonomous Self” (Romans 7:14-8:1)

- I’m a winner, special and deserve... entitlement; false view that God is OBLIGATED to man (even heard preachers “remind God of his promises; keep him to His Word...”)
- Who is Lord? – the “need” for control
- Nature of Man – sin nature Exposed
- Moral Responsibility – Guilt as a reality, not merely a feeling – showing our NEED
- Nature vs. Self-Consciousness; Character vs. Personality; Guilt vs. Shame; All-value of “choice”

TEXT: Romans 7:13-8:4 (p. 943)

TexBI: God’s Law reveals the sin nature within Paul revealing that nothing good dwells in his flesh (like us all) while the Spirit set us free in Christ, but the struggle continues in this life.

ConBI: Our lives are marked by an ongoing conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. The law shows us how bad we are, but in Christ we have died to the law and live by the Spirit, in ongoing growth in this conflict.

CanBI: We cannot trust in the Self, but only in Christ who has the power to transform us.

HomBI: “Reject Self. Trust in Christ.”

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal truth is presented in the text? We all have a sin nature that rebels against God. Human goodness is a misnomer. Self is sinful.
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? God’s law is pure, and exposes our guilt. Christ’s grace is great, removing that guilt.
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? We cannot escape, deny, or avoid our own sin nature, and our tendency towards self autonomy in rebellion to God.
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? Grow in love with Christ, being surrendered to His Will, empowered by His Spirit. Stay alert to your own tendency towards pride & selfishness.
- 5) How do we see Christ in this text? He has set us free from the power of sin and death, and will ultimately restore us completely at His return.

QUOTES/STATS: According to a study conducted by *Pulpit Digest* and *Preaching*, more than 80 percent of sermons analyzed were anthropocentric, and not theocentric (Wells, *No Place*, 252).

“Autonomous Self in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 4: 10/2/16

INTRO: [Video: “Me Worship”]

Today we'll be looking at the effects of the idea of Self at the center of life and how we can respond to it as Christ-followers. Today's sermon is thus entitled, "Autonomous Self in an iFaith World."

David Wells, in his book *Losing our Virtue, Why the church must recover its moral center* quote...,

So, what do we as Christ-disciples do to live in this world which has lost its moral vision, infatuated with the great God of SELF? I submit it can be found by a proper awareness of:

1. Who we really are,
2. Who God really is, and
3. How we Live under God's Leadership.

TEXT: Romans 7:13-8:4 (p. 943)

Romans 7:13-14

The Law Exposes Sin

Romans 7:15-20

Sin Lurks for Opportunity

Romans 7:21-24

Self is Powerless

- So, the take-away for this: REJECT SELF!

Romans 7:25 – 8:4

Christ Alone sets us Free

REJECT SELF – TRUST IN CHRIST!

1. WHO are we? Sinners who need to be Saved, and Need Christ's continuing grace.
2. WHO is God? The Savior who saves, the Spirit who Empowers, the Father who accepts
3. HOW do we live? By walking in dependence upon His Spirit, not our SELVES.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Trusting in SELF Fails Every Time

Whatever you feed, GROWS.

The closer you walk with Christ, the more AWARE you become of sin.

The longer you walk with Christ, the more DELIGHTED you become in Him.

“New Creations in an iFaith World”

“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 5: 10/16/16

Oct 16 – Part 5. “New Creations” (Titus 3:3-8)

- Holy Spirit regeneration
- God’s calling and wooing
- Salvation by Grace through faith
- Breaking the cycle of sin to live out good works

TEXT: Titus 3:3-8 (p. 998)

TexBI: While we were once lost in unbelief, God saved us and made us new by his Spirit through the grace of Christ so that we would excel in good works.

ConBI: Paul exhorts Titus to refute false doctrine with the true doctrine of our salvation by God’s grace as the sovereign work of His Spirit that as a result we would live more lives consistent with that grace.

CanBI: All of us were born into sin and lived under the dominion of darkness until Christ made us new creations by the regenerating work of His Spirit, transforming us from the inside out so that we could manifest and display his glory to the world.

HomBI: “Made New to Live New!” (God does the Making and God empowers us for the Living)

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal / theological truth is presented in the text? Christ makes us New Creations, giving us eternal life and enabling the fruit of good works. All three Persons of the trinity are active in our salvation: The Father Calls, the Son Pays the Penalty, the Spirit Regenerates!
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? He is the Actor in our Salvation; We are the Recipients.
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? We can NEVER save ourselves, only in Christ can we be reborn.
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? Live in humility, recognizing we are all sinners, and that Christ is the saver, not us. As a result of His New Nature in us, we are to diligently pursue good works for His glory.
- 5) How do we see Christ in this text? His death paid the Penalty. His Spirit regenerates and pours out richly to us being justified by his grace, making us heirs of God’s promises.

QUOTES/STATS: Barna: “*God helps those who help themselves*” = 68% born again Christians & 75% of Americans in general believe this statement. This could be termed tongue in cheek: “Sola Bootstraps”.

THREE MOTIVES:

1. your own pre-christian past [Condition BEFORE Salvation]
2. the saving work of god in believers [Nature of our Salvation]
3. the necessary connection between Christian truth/doctrine and conduct. [Practical RESULT of our Salvation]

“New Creations in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 5: 10/16/16

INTRO: [A lesson from the Caterpillar:

BIG IDEA: “We are Made New to Live New!”

Titus 3:3-8 (p.998)

Titus 3:3

Our “Old Creation” Selves

- (v.3)
- What This Means:
- Sin is a Violation of God’s Ways, and God’s will, which means...
 - Our biggest problem is Moral, not Psychological.
 - Christianity is not a “Self-Improvement Program” = it is Jesus saving the condemned!

We need to be “Made New to Live New”

Titus 3:4-7

Our “New Creation” Selves

What This Means:

- We Cannot Save Ourselves, we must be Born Again through Faith in Christ
 - We Cannot *SAVE* ourselves
 - Our Salvation is *God’s* Work – to Regenerate Us!
 - God wants us to have an *Assurance* of our Salvation

In Christ Alone we are Made New to Live New

Titus 3:8

What This Means:

- We are called to Good Works as the evidence of our faith

In Christ We are Made New to Live New!

“Life Together in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 6: 10/23/16

Oct 23 – Part 6. “Life Together” (1 Cor 12:12-20 – “the Body of Christ”)

- Part of a great Metanarrative (history is His story)
- Gifted to be Useful
- From “I” to “We”
- Ministry of Encouragement
- “I’m Third” (God first, others second, I’m third.)

TEXT: 1 Cor 12:12-20 (p. 959)

SUBJECT: “Unity of the body of Christ”. OBJECT: “Because Christ has designed us to need each other”

TexBI: We are made by God to live in community, each designed as a specific and necessary part, and we need to live together in unity (avoid division) to be complete as Christ’s body.

ConBI: We must pursue unity (and avoid division) for the advancement of the gospel, recognizing that God builds his church placing the parts as He desires for His glory.

CanBI: Christ redeems us to live in unity as His church as a witness to the world, recognizing each member is indispensable. We are to avoid division as it destroys the witness of our unity in the reconciling love of Christ.

HomBI: “We Really do Need Each Other”

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal / theological truth is presented in the text? Christ is the head of the church, and we are the individual members that compose his whole family to witness to his love to the world.
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? God alone gives gifts and places his children in the roles He knows is best – his sovereign control.
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? We cannot say “I do not need you” to anyone, as we all need each other, and when any suffer, all suffer, when any is honored we all rejoice. There is no “island” Christians. (No man is an island).
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? Learn to live in unity with others, especially those more difficult to work with – show honor to all, as each is indispensable to Christ’s body. We are to seek genuine fellowship and avoid the idolatry of an “Idealized church.”
- 5) How do we see Christ in this text? His grace gives honor to those weaker, unrepresentable and calls us to unity with a common focus on His Lordship.

ILLUS: 1. Husbands hate to ask for directions. 2. Human Body’s amazing nature. 3.

QUOTES/STATS: Human body amazing stats.

No man is an island...John Donne

“Life Together in an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 6: 10/23/16

INTRO: [VIDEO “Unity” = making of latte/coffee – many parts, together something wonderful & delicious!

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

- Key Thought: “We Really do Need Each Other”
- Paul’s Analogy: The Human Body.
- “*The Amazing Human Body*” = [Graphic:
<http://distractify.com/old-school/2014/07/20/amazing-facts-about-the-human-body-1197776387>

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” – W.H.O.

Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

(v.12-13) ...so it is with Christ...

Lesson to Learn & Live:

- God calls us to Live in Unity.

¹⁵ If the foot should say...

Lesson to Learn & Live:

- God Designs with Diversity.

¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

Lesson to Learn & Live:

- All members are chosen & arranged by God.

²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

Lesson to Learn & Live:

- Each Member is Important.

²⁵ that there may be no division in the body,

Lesson to Learn & Live:

- We were Made to Need each other
e Live in a world focused on SELF. We carry a tendency, always ends at SELF...

“The Way Out of an iFaith World”
“God-Truth in an iFaith World”– Part 7: 10/30/16

WellsHOM:

- 1) What core doctrinal / theological truth is presented in the text? God is at the blazing Center.
- 2) How is the greatness of God presented in the text? He heals, forgives, and restores personally, and corporately through history.
- 3) How is the autonomous self challenged in the text (FCF)? We are but Dust in need of His grace.
- 4) How can it be practically lived out? Surrendered to a life of thankfulness and humility.
- 5) How do we see Christ in this text? His grace is sufficient for every day.

INTRO: [I'd like to start off today's sermon with a real-life visual aid... “The Sham-Wow!” [As Seen On TV!]-

Title of Today's Sermon is: “The Way Out of an iFaith World.”

TEXT: Psalm 103 (p. 502)

Big Idea: “*Live a God-Saturated Life*”

Psalm 103:1-2 (ESV)

App(lication): “God Deserves ALL of Us.” He doesn't need a “tip” and is not One choice among many... He is the ONLY choice!

Psalm 103:3-5

App: “Only the Lord Can Rescue Us” We cannot Fix/Save/Heal ourselves! (not Therapeutic)

Psalm 103:6-7 “righteousness & justice” = He accomplishes his will because of His nature that is fully just, righteous, fair, and perfect...

App: “We're Accountable to a Just & Holy God.”

Psalm 103:8-16

App: “We are Dependent upon His Grace.”

Psalm 103:17-19

App: “We Can Trust God because He is Faithful.”

Psalm 103:20-22

App: “It's All About God, not about You.” We Live for His Glory. (God is great)

APPENDIX 5: SURVEY #2

Qualitative Survey “God-Truth in an iFaith Culture” – Part 2 (After)

On a Scale of 1-5, how would you respond to the following:

(1=Strongly Disagree ... 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. Objective Moral Truth exists that applies to all people for all times. _____
2. Regular devotional Bible reading is important for spiritual growth. _____
3. I think about God and offer up prayers throughout the day (average day). _____
4. I believe it is my responsibility to share my faith in Christ regularly where appropriate.

5. I believe there may be other ways to heaven besides faith in Jesus. _____
6. I believe morality is a matter of personal preference. _____
7. I believe the Bible can mean whatever you want it to mean. _____
8. I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is our highest authority. _____
9. I believe in the existence of a conscious eternal hell for those who die apart from Christ. _____
10. I believe in the inherent goodness of humanity and that mankind is improving with each generation. _____

Since listening to the “God-Truth in an iFaith Culture” sermon series, briefly answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

11. In what ways do you believe the church has succumbed to “cultural drift” (becoming more conformed to the world)? _____
12. Has your understanding of the purpose of the church, corporate worship, preaching or the core essentials of biblical Christianity changed or grown? If so, how? _____
13. In thinking about the Loss of Truth, why is it important for the church to re-capture the conviction of God’s absolute truth? _____
14. In thinking about the Marginalization of God, why is it important for us to re-locate God back to the center of importance in life? _____
15. In thinking about the Autonomous Self, how should the church combat this trend of consumeristic self-oriented religion? _____

APPENDIX 6: QUALITATIVE SURVEY #1 RESULTS

Qualitative Survey – RESULTS: Part 1 (Before) On a Scale of 1-5, how would you respond to the following:

(1=Strongly Disagree ... 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. Objective Truth exists that applies to all people for all times. = 4.69
2. Regular devotional Bible reading is important for spiritual growth. _ = 4.57
3. I think about God and offer up prayers throughout the day (average day). = 4.5
4. I believe it is my responsibility to share my faith in Christ regularly where appropriate.
= 4.5
5. I believe there may be other ways to heaven besides faith in Jesus. = 1.0
6. I believe morality is a matter of personal preference. _ = 1.29
7. I believe the Bible can mean whatever you want it to mean. __ = 14/14 = 1.0
8. I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is our highest authority. = 5.0
9. I believe in the existence of a conscious eternal hell for those who die apart from
Christ. _ = 4.77
10. I believe in the inherent goodness of humanity and that mankind is improving with
each generation. _ = 1.86

Without consulting outside sources, please respond briefly to the following (your understanding right now, not what you think should be the correct answer. It's okay if you are unsure.)

11. What do you believe is the purpose of the church universal?
 - To disciple each other, love one another, share the Word of God.
 - To introduce the world's people to Christ.
 - Be the light and salt to the world.
 - To strengthen believers and to spread the gospel to unbelievers
 - To glorify God and to make Him known. To make disciples of all nations.
 - To bring faith in Jesus to all people. To teach kindness, goodness, and love.
 - To bring you to Jesus Christ.
 - Love God, love others.
 - To be a light in an otherwise dark world used at any time and in any way for His glory & His purposes.

- To introduce others to Christ and to encourage them to grow in their relationship with Him and each other.
- To build relationships on earth w/ other Christians. Show Christ love to non believers together.
- To spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- To spread the gospel; to nurture believers in the faith; to represent Christ on earth.
- Unless the church teaches Jesus and the Salvation through him a so-called church is not. Nor does it have any purpose other than maybe a social club.

12. What is the purpose of the Sunday morning worship service?

- To glorify God.
- Worship service is to show God we love & honor him.
- Worship God, fellowship with brothers/sisters in Christ and be filled with the Word.
- To worship God.
- To glorify God, to worship Him, to encourage one another.
- To worship God and to have fellowship with people.
- To worship Jesus Christ.
- Mutual encouragement toward love & good deeds.
- To pray, worship, & praise the Lord together & have fellowship with fellow believers.
- To corporately worship the Lord and to spend the time focusing on Him, praising Him.
- To show God your praise to acknowledge his greatness.
- To gather together to worship and praise God.
- Celebrate God; offerings of praise & thanksgiving; fellowship of believers with each other & God; farther purpose of the church (see #11)
- Fellowship within a church family gathering together to hear the teachings of the Bible through the Pastor.

13. What do you feel is the purpose of preaching in a worship service

- To share the Word.
- To help us learn His ways, what he wants us to do.
- Help the flock understand the Bible and its applications to daily living.
- To instruct and to explain the written Word of God as it applies to daily life and the attainment of heaven.
- To proclaim the Word of God for mutual knowledge and edification.
- To teach the Bible.
- Teaching the meaning of the Bible.
- Hearing from God.
- To teach, inform, explain, guide the congregation in God's Word and allow the Lord to speak through you to us and what we need to hear.

- The purpose of preaching is to encourage the people to grow in their relationship with Christ and to teach them biblical truths.
- Spiritual growth & knowledge.
- To provide a deep understanding of the Bible.
- Teaching the Word; prophesying God's Word; see #11, #12, encouragement, support of church body.
- Knowledge

14. What do you believe are the core essentials to biblical Christianity?

- Belief in God, our father, our salvation, eternal life with god in heaven.
- The deity of Christ, saved by grace alone, Christ died & rose from the dead for us, for our sins.
- Faith, love, obedience.
- Belief in the trinity, the atonement on the cross, the hope of salvation.
- The deity/humanity of Jesus, death and resurrection of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture.
- To believe in Jesus and to learn and practice what He said.
- Christ died on the cross, was resurrected to pay for our – my sins.
- Loving God & Loving others.
- Believe Jesus died on the cross as a just payment for our sins and rose again, returning to heaven w/ God the Father.
- Essentials: to love the Lord; to accept His death as one's punishment for one's sin; to try to live a life pleasing to Him; to grow in knowledge of the truth; to love others.
- Forgiveness & love.
- The Bible and studying the Word of God.
- Faith in Christ's sacrifice on cross; fatherhood of God; inspiration of Holy Spirit; Infallibility of Scripture; Salvation by Faith; Heaven/Hell.
- To bring the joy of Jesus.

15. What do you think it means to be a disciple of Christ?

- To share the Word of God.
- A disciple of Christ, follows him & learns his ways & tries to be like Him.
- Be led by the Holy Spirit and follow and trust Jesus in all we do.
- To believe in and attempt to live as a follower of Christ according to his principles.
- To follow his teachings, to know Him and the power of his resurrection, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- To follow Him and share the good news with others when appropriate. To pray for people in needs.
- Lots of Work.

- Loving God & loving others.
- To follow His teachings, be obedient, listen to the Holy Spirit, be faithful to Him, love God & others.
- To be a disciple is to love & follow Christ and his teachings. It means to desire to live a godly life and to want to please Him in all we do.
- Single-minded, Bible is the only truth; God will show the way.
- To carry the message and live a godly life as best as able knowing I'm still a sinner.
- To follow Christ's teaching and continue his mission to the world; includes prayer & study to be prepared & approved.
- To be able to show others how Jesus can change their lives.

APPENDIX 7: QUALITATIVE SURVEY #2 RESULTS

Qualitative Survey– RESULTS– Part 2 (After)

On a Scale of 1-5, how would you respond to the following:

(1=Strongly Disagree ... 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. Objective Moral Truth exists that applies to all people for all times. = 4.78
2. Regular devotional Bible reading is important for spiritual growth. = 4.56
3. I think about God and offer up prayers throughout the day (average day). = 4.22
4. I believe it is my responsibility to share my faith in Christ regularly where appropriate.
= 4.33
5. I believe there may be other ways to heaven besides faith in Jesus. = 1.38
6. I believe morality is a matter of personal preference. = 1.0
7. I believe the Bible can mean whatever you want it to mean. = 1.44
8. I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is our highest authority. = 5.0
9. I believe in the existence of a conscious eternal hell for those who die apart from Christ. = 4.56
10. I believe in the inherent goodness of humanity and that mankind is improving with each generation. = 1.33

Since listening to the “God-Truth in an iFaith Culture” sermon series, briefly answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

11. In what ways do you believe the church has succumbed to “cultural drift” (becoming more conformed to the world)?

- Less Talk of Sin
- I think churches have become more accepting of sinful behavior so as not to turn people away and hopefully they will turn from sin.
- Some churches have accepted gays and accept people living together unwed.
- Trying not to offend
- Many believe the 10 commandments aren’t really meant for today and rules can be bent or manipulated to satisfy their own selfish desires.
- Our desire to be entertained or have pleasure, i.e. movies, Many Christians don’t seem to see the negative effects of movie content and allowing sinful immoral content into our minds and understand that we are affected. Music, “white lies” and other areas of “fudging” the truth.
- We tend to follow feelings as opposed to truth. How something makes us feel rather than whether it is true or not.
- Being tolerant for the purpose of filling seats.
- Not dealing w/ sin properly; homosexuality being condoned instead of being called sin; less focus on God’s holiness; weakening of absolute truth.

12. Has your understanding of the purpose of the church, corporate worship, preaching or the core essentials of biblical Christianity changed or grown? If so, how

- I don't think so
- Yes, church is more than 2 hours Sunday. It is learning God's work and having other believers in our lives.
- What is corporate worship?
- No
- No
- No I think it remains pretty strong.
- I continue to be aware and desire to remain diligent to stay away from "cultural drift."
- Has not changed but grown clear – more knowledge
- I feel re-convicted of God's holy standards and encouraged because I know He is the victory.

13. In thinking about the Loss of Truth, why is it important for the church to re-capture the conviction of God's absolute truth?

- n/a
- Church should be teaching what the Bible and Jesus teach, to bring people to Christ for salvation.
- n/a
- Without the foundation of God's truth, the church is pathetic and heretical.
- Because it's the way it should be. He is truth. He is God. Sorry I don't have any grand theological explanation – it just is. I'm sure my answer would not hold water if I was to try to discuss the subject. Thus, I avoid getting into theological debates.
- This generation needs to understand the realization of cause & effect. There are consequences to our choices, whether good or bad. Either God's Word is wholly true or it's not. We can't pick the parts we like and ignore the ones we don't.
- It is our foundation; all else is shifting sand.
- Because the loss of truth opens doors for evil.
- If we don't believe in the truth that we are all condemned to hell, then why would we need Jesus?

14. In thinking about the Marginalization of God, why is it important for us to re-locate God back to the center of importance in life?

- I believe God at the center makes life easier to live, more secure
- So we can live our lives the way God wants us to.
- God must be put back in the center
- If He is not the center then we are, and that is pride filled idolatry
- It's important because He is God and it is his rightful place. And it is in the best interest of all.
- He is the All-in-All, Creator, Sustainer, Be-All, Knows-all, Sovereign, Just, in control of all.

- Our understanding of who God is, is central to our faith, and to worship him in Spirit and in truth. He must be central.
- Because He deserves to be the largest thing in our lives.
- That's the only place He belongs.

15. In thinking about the Autonomous Self, how should the church combat this trend of consumeristic self-oriented religion?

- n/a
- Material items do not make us happy. Walking with Jesus brings us contentment.
- Stick with the Bible
- With a loving holy slap on the hand. It's not about you. Grow up. Stop trying to find ways to be offended. Find ways to be grateful.
- Aside from preaching it from the pulpit and discussing it in study groups and each hearer purposefully combatting it in one's own life, I don't know.
- Fight against it by preaching community, bearing one another's burdens, getting into the trenches with people and actually living out what's preached.
- Be involved; recognize the place that corporate faith and worship has in our lives. We gather to worship Him and bring Him glory, not to better ourselves.
- Preach the Word of God truthfully; without changing it and let the Holy Spirit work in our hearts.

APPENDIX 8: TRANSCRIPT OF DAVID WELLS INTERVIEW #2

Dr. Wells' Interview #2 Transcript: January 9, 2017, 10am – Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Dr. Wells' Office

I think what you're asking is: How you practice expository convictions given this particular context, so it's really practice. Now, so many sermons, when it comes to practice, they're really thinking technique, period. I mean that's the only application that there is. I'm inclined to think that if this cultural context that we live in is as potentially pernicious as I think it is. Then, our practice needs to be much more, much deeper, and more coherent, and that's what you're thinking about.

I'll be honest and tell that I think, first of all, I think this is the most difficult part to preaching. And it's the one that I do least well. I wish I didn't say that, but it really is true. The thing is that as a preacher, and we're all under the rush of pressure of things to be done and people wanting things and we're always trying to do our work in less and less time. This is true of everyone; it's true of me too. Now, the thing is that when you're trying to understand a passage that you're going to preach on, you've got commentaries; and those commentaries really do help you. They're not a short-cut, but they really do help you to get that work done. When you're talking about the practice, which is what we're talking about here, you don't have a commentary. That's a problem. It's a much more complex thing.

Have you read H. Richard Niebuhr's book *Christ in Culture*? [no.] You won't rise up and call me blessed yet again because every time you come in here and you get more to read. *Christ in Culture* is not a difficult book to read, that's a good thing about it. But, I do think in terms of your question, if I were in your shoes, I would really spend time with Niebuhr, and just figure out. I can't quite remember when it was published; it was about 1950, so it's an older book. But it is definitive in that it gave the church the language to talk about the problem that you're thinking about.

What he does, it's an historical study, really, how the churches thought on this question of the relationship of Christ and Culture. And he comes up with what have been five models of understanding. And he demonstrates this from church history. The five models: "Christ of Culture," that's the liberal view. This is not in any order. So the thought was that for the liberals, modern progress was itself the kingdom of God. For you, for me: singularly not helpful. "Christ above culture:" the Roman Catholic view, and for me not helpful. But there are three which are helpful in terms of thinking about your problem.

And I should just say that the way people have read Niebuhr's book, they have thought that you had to pick one of these, just one, and so typically "Christ Transforming culture" is the Reformed view; "Christ in culture in", I don't know if it's "Paradox," I'm not sure if he used that word, I've forgotten, but that is the Lutheran view. "Christ Against Culture," that's the Anabaptist view; that's the way people have read it; that you've got to pick one of these.

Niebuhr himself wrote an essay, a little while after he had written *Christ in Culture*, which I've read, in which he argues that it's not a question of picking one of

these, and that at different times, one or other will prevail more than the others. So I have found this very helpful, and I think in terms of your work, what you should do in particular; now personally, I mean it's interesting to see what the liberal Christ of Culture means; it's interesting, but it's of no use. Forgive me, but it's of no use to what you're doing. Now the Roman Catholic thing, its view about reason, about how you can sort of reason your way; it's interesting but of no benefit to you.

But the other three I would look at very carefully and think about them. They contain, each one in my view, each one, contains elements that are really helpful to think about, and which you will, without maybe even knowing it, are going to be incorporating into your practice of your expository sermons.

Christ Against Culture: now this is as I said, this is what people say the Anabaptist, and the Amish and Stanley Hauerwas [*Resident Aliens*] really complains against this, I think with justification. The fact is that in this culture, as in any culture, there are always elements that are in hostile relationship to Christian truth and to the gospel. And, these elements cannot be placated without damaging a Christian's stance and Christian understanding. So that's the first thing that you need to really, really identify in the practice of the homiletic method. What is it in this culture, on the subject that you're talking about, that is arrayed against a Christian understanding and Christian practice? You've got to get *real clarity* on that. So, Christ against Culture. I personally don't think that's the only element. I don't think it's at all helpful or for that matter faithful for a Christian simply to say, "I am opposed to everything in culture and everything in culture is opposed to me," because it's not true. So, there are elements, no question, Christ against Culture; Christ is against certain things in the culture. Biblical preaching will always and at every moment be opposed to those things.

The Lutheran Position: Now they say, I've just said Lutheran, but it's not only Lutheran. It's my position, too, as a Reformed guy. The argument is that Christ and culture are in Paradox to one another in the sense that you cannot make a transition from the one into the other. People cannot make a transition from their condition of sinfulness and rebellion into the gospel. There is a way to get from the one to the other and it is only through Christ and his cross. So, seeing that, with real clarity, is very important. My read of a lot of evangelical preaching is that it does not see this with real clarity. It might be a matter of doctrine that's assented to, "Oh yes, of course only in Christ," but when it actually comes down to the preaching, what is being handed out often, certainly not all preachers, but I've heard it enough, what's being handed out is really a sort of "How to do your Christian life."

[a lot of moral exemplar... "yes" ...which also feeds into therapeutic "yes, yes" how to have a better, happier life "Exactly." Would examples of this be Tim Keller or Bryan Chapell where they bring you specifically to where you *can't* get there from here apart from Christ? "Yes, yes, that's exactly correct."]

The third position which always has relevance to you as a preacher is the so-called Reformed preference of Christ Transforming culture. You really have to think about that one. Now, again, I'm a Reformed guy, but I am just a little bit uneasy with the way that some Reformed people adopt this. I don't want to get too in the weeds here, but. The way people used to think about Culture was something very close to High Culture.

So the question, if you're a Christian as Reformed, the question always was "What does Christian faith have to say to art, music, literature?" Those kinds of things... The way people understand culture today though is very different. In fact, in the front of Neibuhr's, right up front of Christ and Culture, now this is being written 70, maybe more than 70 years ago; He defines culture as the artificial things that are built upon Nature. For example, a river is nature, a canal is culture (this is Neibuhr). A stone is nature, an arrowhead is culture. This is how he's thinking about it. And I think it's good so far as it goes, but doesn't go nearly far enough, because he's thinking about cities that we have built, paving stones, the steel, all of this. He's not thinking so much of the environment that the city creates [the world of ideas?] Yes, and what happens in big cities like Boston, New York? What happens is, first of all they're magnets, because people are coming for work and all that, so they're magnets and bring together very, very diverse people: different religions, different lifestyles, different ethnicities. And then cities develop their own internal, sort of microcosms, with certain social patterns, good or bad, emerging. But overall what you have is an environment of great anonymity, because the people you rub shoulder with, sit next to on the "T", the person who serves you at Macy's, you don't know any of them. And that's like a lot of our work. Just like this phone call I took this morning, I actually didn't even get a person, but had I gotten a person I wouldn't have known who that person was. So cities create an environment, they enable an environment to grow up which, like all of human life, has good and bad in it. So now, sorry this is a long rambling answer to the question I pose, "What does Christ transforming culture entail?" If this is what we're thinking about culture, how would Christians be able to effect an environment as big as that of New York City or Boston for that matter? When you think about it...

[Is it where you seek to have believers enter in positions of influence "Yes" - in art, in movies, in the advertising industry, etc. "yes" where they're presenting more Christian biblical based values? "Yes, that's the goal" So be salt and light to the culture having that transforming effect?]

"Yes, but when you think about it, but what you've just said has been the objective for a long time, and people have used this language of being salt and light, and certainly Christians are in the small contexts immediately around them. Whether Christians can actually change the whole culture, or effect the whole environment, that I think is a difficult question. James Hunter has written a book, now you may not want to read it, but at least you might want to know about it. It's called *"To Change the World."* Hunter is an evangelical believer, he's actually a friend of mine. He teaches at UVA, he's a Gordon college graduate actually. He, in this book *"To Change the World"* he really sort of steps back and says we've got to get much more modest in what we as Christians think can be accomplished culturally and much more modest about how we express it. But I'm just sort of ruminating on this question, but there's no question though that Christ transforming culture, at least when you as a preacher are looking at those people in the pews, so Okay, now it's not the big picture of Hollywood and technology and all of this, but you just looking at those people in the pews, that's your work, Christ transforming culture. Yes. I think this is very applicable to the pew and the way that you are working out your sermons. Because every one of those people has connections on their street, neighbors next door, people with whom they work. And on this sort of much more

modest basis, yes there is a transformational mission that Christian faith has, no question about it.

So, this has been a long rambling discourse that I didn't intend to give you, but I would look at Neibuhr's book, and in particular those three models, and I would take the essential elements from them, and then you have, I think it was four point: The Marginalization of God, the Autonomous Self, the Loss of Truth, and Christ. So, you've got your four points. So, here's something that would actually be quite interesting. You've got those four points, and you've got these three different ways of relating Christ and culture, or elements in the relationship between Christ and culture (that would be a better way of putting it). So how would these three elements from Christ and culture intersect with our four themes?

[give examples of how we would preach that would help them; and I think I might have been. Most of my weight has been on the Anabaptist way in terms of recognizing the two defaults we recognize among evangelicals to conform so much with the culture that we just made another Disney like moment and reinforced their consumerism, individualistic autonomous self; or we want to stay faithful to preaching God's Word, but it doesn't connect to their daily lives, so they've got great exposition and doctrine, but we didn't bridge that. "that's exactly our point." And so one of my goals was to have a response, where the legs are from the pulpit for the preacher, to help people become aware that there is a cultural influence, and to our own detriment if we are not aware, we are in a world that is being operated by the prince of the power of the air that is contrary. We're not to live as people cursing the darkness and hating the world with our placards "we're against everything." We're for Christ. "Um Hm". But always bringing, "how does that relate to your world and where it's gonna rub against that world. You talked about tension and one of your articles said to be aware of both and to connect those two worlds, but always bring to an awareness the weakness of our people is they're not aware that they're being constantly bombarded by this wave, so it's that how to be aware that we are not of the world. And so it's more the harmful Anabaptist way. As far as the Paradox, I could see that fitting in with the Christ centered approach "Absolutely." Helping them see how do we stumble and think these wrong worldly thoughts as consumers, we can't really fix ourselves. This isn't a "five steps to a better you." "Um Hm" It's that we need Christ can give to transform our thinking to change our hearts, constantly fed on His good news, so that's I'm just thinking out loud. As far as transforming, I think that's always my application to the sermon. A Sermon without an application isn't a sermon. That would be on a microcosm on how you as an office manager, how you can have a positive influence on your office environment; as one working at the transfer station, how you can show a Christ-like attitude that can have an influence. It might not change Hollywood or NYC, but it will change your micro-culture. "Yes." So now, I've got some more thinking to do... I'm trying not to pile-on all of these components of Robinson, Pelton, Wells, Neibuhr, etc. We are constantly being confronted with destructive things... You talk about Triviality, Uncertainty and Complacency and how these things are hidden and camouflaged, and so I'm trying to take the camouflage off and how it looks to live, and so you're suggesting how these four aspects are worked out in the three aspects or elements from Neibuhr... not every sermon must have these things... is that tracking?]

Exactly. That's right on the money... [I'm coming away with more books to read – laughter]. I think the point you just made is a very good one. When you're doing this sort of work, there is so much literature; there are so many different viewpoints, so many paradigms, and methodologies. It can just go on endlessly. And the point is not to, as it were, parrot all of these different angles of vision, but rather, despite having read all of this and being aware of it all, you have absolute clarity on what you are driving toward. And that is easier said than done, believe me. [I'm on the right track?] Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

[other informal thoughts from me...]

I was just talking with a pastor from Alabama, he was just musing about the fact that everybody of course is a Christian. But what they really need to hear is the gospel. That's the problem that he is up against all the time... [question to clarify] They assume they're Christian and assume they assume the culture is basically Christian. Of course, it is more Christian than up here; we're the most secularized region of the country. But what he is really up against is the old liberal Christ of culture; you really do have a strange kind of liberalism that's within the evangelical world. No, I think you're seeing it very clearly.

[I will be compiling the results from my surveys... "It's too bad you have so few respondents... Probably not enough to draw any conclusions from. I wish your congregation would have been more helpful to you. Can you twist their arm?"... Thank you for your time.]

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